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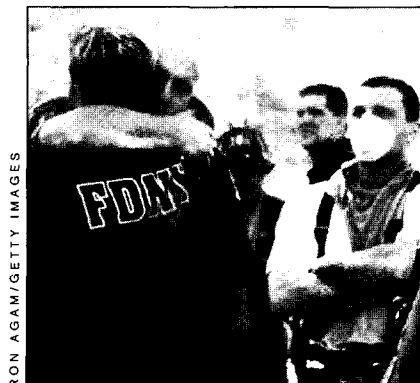
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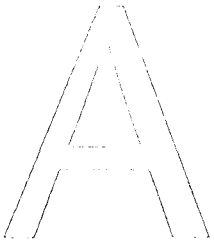
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mericans are always for national service—except when we're not.

Our public rhetoric has always laid heavy stress on the obligations of citizenship. "With rights come responsibilities." The statement rolls off the tongues of politicians without their giving it a moment's thought. "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." John F. Kennedy's words are so embedded in our civic catechism that the mere mention of the word "service" automatically calls them forth. On Veterans Day and Memorial Day, we rightly extol the valor of those "without whose sacrifices we would not enjoy our freedom." Bill Clinton praised the idea of service. George W. Bush now does the same. It is one of the few issues on which our last two presidents agree.

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Yet how firm is our belief in service? There is no prospect anytime soon that we will return to a military draft—and our own military is skeptical that a draft would work. The number of politicians who support compulsory national service—the case for it is made powerfully in this issue by Robert Litan—is small. President Clinton succeeded in pushing his AmeriCorps program through Congress, building on the ideas of Will Marshall and others at the Democratic Leadership Council who sought to reward young people with stipends and scholarships for giving time to their country. But many Republicans denounced the idea as "paid volunteerism." Representative Dick Armey, the Texas Republican, described it as "a welfare program for aspiring yuppies" that would displace "private charity with government-managed, well-paid social activism, based on the elitist assumption that commu-

# United We

nity service is not now taking place.”

And in truth, many Americans doubt that they or their fellow citizens actually “owe” anything to a country whose main business they see as preserving individual liberty, personal as well as economic. In a free society, liberty is a right owed to all, worthy and unworthy alike.

Finally, Americans differ widely over which kinds of national service are genuinely valuable. Many who honor military service are skeptical of voluntarism that might look like, in Armev’s terms, “social activism.” Supporters of work among the poor are often dubious of military service. Most Americans honor both forms of devotion to country, and we have included here powerful testimonials to the varieties of civic dedication. But in our public arguments, the skeptical voices are often the loudest.

Our divisions about the meaning of service are rooted deeply in history. At

the founding of our nation, liberal and civic republican ideas jostled for dominance. The liberals viewed personal freedom as the heart of the American experiment. The civic republicans valued freedom, too, but stressed that self-rule demanded a great deal from citizens. The liberals stressed rights. The civic republicans stressed obligations to a common good and, as the philosopher Michael Sandel has put it, “a concern for the whole, a moral bond with the community whose fate is at stake.” In our time, the clash between these older traditions lives on in the intellectual wars between libertarians and communitarians. When it comes to national service, the libertarians lean toward skepticism, the communitarians toward a warm embrace.

Yes, we have changed since September 11, 2001. Respect for service soared as the nation forged a new and stronger sense of solidarity in the face of deadly

enemies. What has been said so often in the past year still bears repeating: our view of heroes underwent a remarkable, and sudden, change. The new heroes are public servants—police, firefighters, rescue workers, postal workers whose lives were threatened, our men and women in uniform—not CEOs, high-tech wizards, rock stars, or sports figures. At a time when citizens focus on urgent national needs, those who serve their country naturally rise in public esteem. In the face of an attack that imperiled rich and poor, powerful and powerless alike, it was natural that, in Sandel’s words, “a concern for the whole” and “a moral bond with the community whose fate is at stake” became more than abstract concepts.

Accordingly, the politics of national service also has been transformed. Even before the attacks of September 11, President Bush had signaled a warmer view of service than most in his party. In

Philip Gould/Corbis

# Serve?

By E. J. Dionne, Jr., and Kayla Meltzer Drogosz

# National Service

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choosing two Republican supporters of the idea—former Mayor Steve Goldsmith of Indianapolis and Leslie Lenkowsky—to head his administration's service effort, Bush made clear he intended to take it seriously. But after September 11, he made service a central theme of his administration. In his State of the Union message, he called on Americans to give two years of service to the nation over their lifetimes and announced the creation of the USA Freedom Corps. It was a patriotic, post-September 11 gloss on the old Clinton ideas—and the ideas of John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and his father, the first President Bush, who offered the nation a thousand points of light.

There is a new acknowledgment across the political divides that government support for volunteers can provide essential help for valuable institutions that we too often take for granted. It is easy for politicians to talk about the urgency of strengthening "civil society." But through AmeriCorps and other programs, the government has found a practical (and not particularly costly) way to make good on the rhetoric. Paradoxically, as Steven Waldman points out here, AmeriCorps, a Democratic initiative, fitted in neatly with the Republicans' emphasis on faith-based programs. Democrats were acknowledging the need to strengthen programs outside of government; Republicans, that voluntary programs could use government's help.

That national service has become a bipartisan goal is an important achievement. It is reflected in the White House's Citizen Service Act and in bills cosponsored by, among others, Senators John McCain and Evan Bayh. In this case, the world of legislation mirrors the spirit of the moment. As Marc Magee and Steven Nider of the Progressive Policy Institute reported this summer, applications for AmeriCorps have jumped 50 percent since September 11, those for the Peace Corps have doubled, and those for Teach for America have tripled. Yes, a difficult economy may have pushed more young Americans toward such endeavors. Nonetheless, their choices point to the power of the service idea.

But what is the connection between the ideas of service and citizenship?

**Citizenship and Service**

Citizenship cannot be reduced to service. And service—good works whether of faith communities, the private sector, or "communities of character"—cannot replace the responsibilities

of government. Service can become a form of cheap grace, a generalized call on citizens to do kind things as an alternative to a genuine summons for national sacrifice or a fair apportionment of burdens among the more and less powerful, the more and less wealthy. But when service is seen as a bridge to genuine political and civic responsibility, it can strengthen democratic government and foster the republican virtues.

Lenkowsky made this connection when he urged attendees at a Corporation for National and Community Service conference to turn "civic outrage into civic engagement" by increasing the reach and effectiveness of volunteer programs. No one can dispute visionaries like Harris Wofford and Alan Khazei, who have shown how AmeriCorps, VISTA, the Senior Corps, and the Peace Corps have transformed communities. But Paul Light questions whether this transformation is sustainable. Can episodic volunteerism build the capacity and effectiveness of public and nonprofit organizations? And to what extent can we separate respect for service through volunteerism from a genuine respect for those who make public service a way of life—in the military, the local uniformed services, the schools and the hospitals, and (dare one even use the word) the bureaucracies? As Alice Rivlin notes, "recreational" government bashing "saves us from facing up to how hard it is to make public policy in a free market economy." Will the new respect for service make government bashing less satisfying as a hobby? It's possible, but we are not holding our breath.

Underlying the debate over national service is an argument over whether service is necessary or merely "nice." If service is just a nice thing to do, it's easy to understand why critics, well represented in these pages by Bruce Chapman and Tod Lindberg, express such strong reservations about government-led service programs. But is it possible that service is something more than nice? What if it is—as Bob Litan, Harris Wofford, Carmen Sirianni, and Charlie Cobb suggest in different ways—a means to strengthen the ties that bind us as a nation? What if it creates bridges across groups in our society that have little to do with each other on any given day? What if service, as the New Left's Port Huron Statement put it 40 years ago, can mean "bringing people out of isolation and into community"? What if it fosters civic and political participation in a society that seems not to hold the arts of public life in



the highest esteem? In sum, what if service is not simply a good in itself, but a means to many ends?

### Service and a New Generation

Surely one of these ends is the engagement of young Americans in public life. As Peter Hart and Mario Brossard argue here, the evidence of many surveys suggests that young Americans are deeply engaged in civic activity. In his 2000 campaign, Senator John McCain—initially a skeptic of national service, now a strong supporter—won a wide following among the young by urging them to aspire to things “beyond your own self-interest.” Service learning, increasingly popular in our public schools, has been linked with a heightened sense of civic responsibility and personal effectiveness. If the new generation connected its impulses to service with a workable politics, it could become one of the great reforming generations in our nation’s history.

And service could become a pathway to a stronger sense of citizenship. As Jane Eisner argues, service “must produce more than individual fulfillment for those involved and temporary assistance for those in need.” It should, she says, “lead to an appetite for substantive change, a commitment to address the social problems that have created the need for service in the first place.” Eisner suggests that as a nation, we should celebrate the First Vote cast by young people with the same fanfare that greets other moments of passage to adult responsibility. The goal would be to encourage a new generation that is gravitating toward national service to make the connection “between service to the community and the very process that governs community life.”

A focus on service and the links it forges between rights and responsibilities of citizenship could also offer new ways out of old political impasses. For example, Andrew Stern, the president of the Service Employees International Union, suggests that a two-year commitment to national service could become a pathway for undocumented workers to legalize their status and for legal immigrants to speed their passage to citizenship. And former felons now denied voting rights

might “earn credits toward restoration of full citizenship” through service.

Jeff Swartz, the CEO of Timberland, offers practical proposals for business at a moment when the public demand for responsible corporate behavior is rising. He suggests that obligations to shareholders, to employees, and to the community are linked. One reason his company is on *Fortune* magazine’s list of the 100 “Best Companies to Work For” is its program of service sabbaticals through which employees can spend up to six months working at existing or start-up nonprofits. Their purpose is not simply to do “good works,” but also to build the capacity of the organizations that promote social change.

At its best, service is not make-work but what Harry Boyte and Nancy Kari, in *Building America*, have called “public work.” It is work that “is visible, open to inspection, whose significance is widely recognized” and can be carried out by “a mix of people whose interests, backgrounds, and resources may be quite different.” Service as public work is the essence of the democratic project. It solves common problems and creates common things. Public work entails not altruism, or not only altruism, but enlightened self-interest—a desire to build a society in which the serving citizen wants to live.

It is possible to be cynical about the new call to service. It can be a terribly convenient way for politicians to seem to be calling for sacrifice without demanding much of citizens. At little cost to themselves, advocates of both conservative and liberal individualism can use service to shroud their real intentions in the decent drapery of community feeling. Service, badly conceived, can distance citizens from public problems. Those

who serve can help people “out there,” as if the problems “they” have are disconnected from the society in which the server lives. The sociologist Michael Schudson has argued that President Bush’s ideal citizen is a “Rotarian, moved by a sense of neighborliness, Christian charity, and social responsibility, but untouched by having a personal stake in public justice.” His point is not to knock Rotarians. It’s to argue that self-interest in pursuit of justice is a virtue. As Schudson notes in describing the civil rights movement, the most dramatic expansion of democracy and citizenship in our lifetime was brought about by citizens “driven not by a desire to serve but by an effort to overcome indignities they themselves have suffered.”

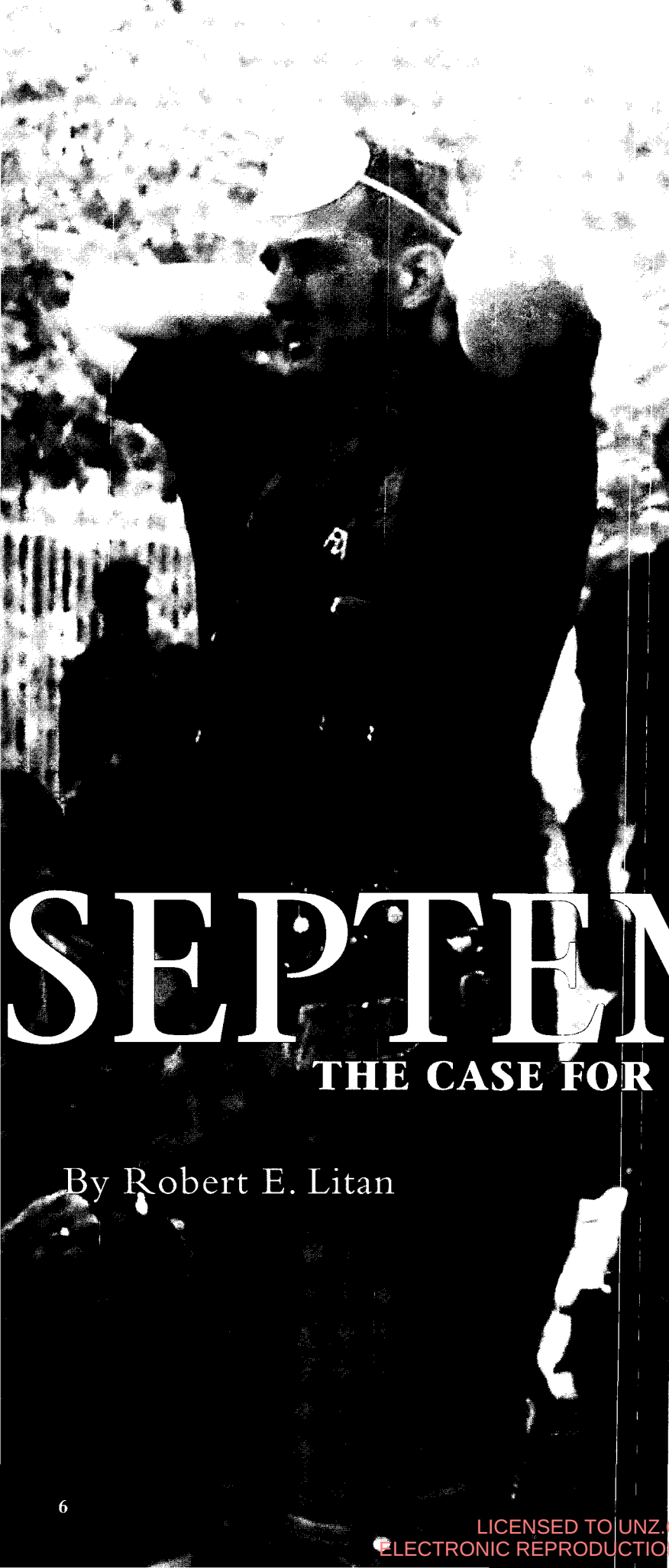
It’s an important point. But it’s also true that Rotarians are good citizens. Neighborliness, charity, and social responsibility are genuine virtues. It is both good and useful to assert, as Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin did, that “my neighbor’s material needs are my spiritual needs.” It’s just possible that a nation responding to the call to service would, over time, become a nation deeply engaged in questions of public justice.

The debate over national service is a debate over how we Americans think of ourselves. It’s a debate over how we will solve public problems and what we owe our country and each other. If our nation is to continue to prosper, it’s a debate we will have in every generation. For if we decide there are no public things to which we are willing to pledge some of our time and some of our effort—not to mention “our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor”—then we will have quietly abandoned our nation’s experiment in liberty rooted in mutual assistance and democratic aspiration. ■

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***A volume on national service and citizenship expanding on the essays presented here and including new contributions will be published by the Brookings Institution Press this spring.***



Americans are a generous people. The attacks of September 11 produced an outpouring of donations to help families of the victims. Americans took pride in the heroism of public servants—firefighters, the police, FBI agents, and men and women in the military—who responded to the call of duty. It was also widely felt that September 11 would change the lives of many young Americans, who not only would have the images of the attacks seared into their memories, but also would pursue careers in public service or the “helping” professions.

# SEPTEMBER

## THE CASE FOR UNIVERSAL SERVICE

By Robert E. Litan

Ron Agam/Getty Images

*Robert E. Litan is vice president and director of the Brookings Economic Studies program, where he also holds the Cabot Family Chair in Economics. This article draws on related work in Sticking Together: The Israeli Experiment in Pluralism (Brookings, 2002), which he coauthored with Jacov Kop.*



Time will tell whether those initial impulses toward helping others will last. But time alone won't determine the outcome. Public policy can and will have an impact. If Americans want more of their children to pursue service careers or at least devote time to activities that help and support others, whether in the public or private sector, it will certainly help if government encourages or provides opportunities for such service. The same is true for adults wishing to serve in some capacity, as many apparently were willing to do in the weeks following September 11.

President Bush, for one, has recognized the role of public policy by supporting a much-expanded voluntary national service program. In his fiscal year 2003 budget, he called for the creation of the USA Freedom Corps, which would combine and expand the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps programs and add a new Senior Corps as well as a volunteer program for college students. Bush proposed increasing the funding of all national service programs by nearly \$300 million and eventually placing more than 2 million Americans a year in some kind of formal national service (75,000 in full-time AmeriCorps programs). He also called on Americans to

and applications to the Peace Corps are up 18 percent, according to a June survey in *Time*. But the surge in interest may also be linked to the poor job market this past year for college graduates.

In short, there are limits to volunteerism. Can we do more? Here I lay out the case for moving beyond even the president's new initiative toward some kind of universal service requirement, one that would offer all young Americans a choice, preferably after finishing high school, to enter military or civilian service for at least a year. Those opting and qualifying for the military would be given additional monetary incentives to do so.

Having a reasoned debate about universal service before September 11 would have been unthinkable. It isn't (or at least shouldn't be) so anymore.

### **The Case for Universal Service, Now**

As the Bush administration has reminded us, we are at war—this time, against an enemy whose main targets of attack are American civilians. Unlike past wars, this new war on terrorism, we are told, could last a generation or more. If, as appears likely, the nation may soon be at war with Iraq again, the question

assume any risk of war that may come about.

But unlike America's past foreign wars, the war on terrorism requires a vigilant homeland security effort in addition to an offensive military (and intelligence) campaign abroad. This time around, it is not just those in the military who are in harm's way. We are all potential targets or victims—and thus all have some obligation to help secure America. As a practical matter, neither the economy nor society could function if everyone stood guard duty or devoted their time to protecting the homeland. Paid professionals have and will continue to carry out these duties. But if this new war is, as it is said to be, a generational event, then why not also ask the next generation—all of whom may be at risk—to help shoulder the security effort?

The need is there. Young people in service, provided they were properly trained, could substantially augment the guards now in place at a wide range of public and private facilities. The nation could also use many more inspectors at its ports—perhaps our greatest vulnerability today—where only a tiny fraction of incoming containers is examined. Some highly motivated young people may even decide to train for security-related careers—as police officers, customs or immigration officials, or FBI agents—and serving in all of these jobs should qualify for universal service.

Though one good reason for adopting universal service now is to respond to the military and homeland threat, universal service makes sense in other ways in this time of national peril.

First, universal service could provide some much-needed “social glue” in an embattled American society that is growing increasingly diverse—by race, national origin, and religious preference—and where many young Americans from well-to-do families grow up and go to school in hermetically sealed social environments. Twenty years ago, when America was much less diverse than it is now and is going to be, the

give two years over the course of their lives to service.

The Bush proposals tap into two strong American traditions—a commitment to volunteerism and a resistance to compulsory service except in wars requiring a massive call-up. With the exception of some community service programs in some high schools in certain states, this nation has never required its young citizens to perform civilian service.

The president's call to service may be working. Applications by college graduates to AmeriCorps are up 75 percent

arises: why should the burden of the war—and the risks of getting injured or killed—rest only on the shoulders of those who volunteer to fight it?

There are answers to this question, of course. One is that the military should be able to handle even a stepped-up military campaign against terrorism. After all, the armed forces fought Iraq in 1991 with roughly 500,000 troops; this time around, the highest projections seem to fall in the 250,000 range. A second answer is that the men and women in uniform are paid to put themselves in harm's way, and they volunteered to

# VOLUNTEERING AT GROUND ZERO

**O**n September 14, Ohio University student Bryan Randolph decided he could no longer watch footage of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center from his campus in Athens. Wanting to assist the victims hands-on, he called his mother and said he was thinking of dropping his classes and going to help. "I think you should go," was her reply.

Later that week Randolph headed for New York City, where he joined the American Red Cross at Ground Zero. Realizing that much more help was needed, he returned to Athens to recruit more student volunteers. He contacted the Athens County chapter of the Red Cross and, together with several friends, enrolled in disaster relief courses. With donations received from passing out candles, Randolph and his friends organized the Ohio Students United for New York relief group. They left for New York City on October 5.

The students immediately began working in Red Cross operations throughout Ground Zero. Some worked in kitchens, while others

response vehicles (ERVs) to distribute food and water.

By the time the group returned to Ohio a few weeks later, word had spread of their accomplishments. "When I got back there were e-mails and phone calls like you wouldn't believe from people who wanted to help," said Randolph. The original small group quickly grew into a statewide relief effort. Ohio University President Robert Glidden personally paid for a charter bus to transport

the students back to New York.

On its fourth trip the group operated a respite center at Ground Zero, where they worked tirelessly to provide everything from hot meals to sleeping quarters for exhausted firemen and construction crews. Randolph recalled, "It's hard work but it's incredibly rewarding. I will never forget one day, September 23. I was working on an ERV with some friends when a fireman came up to one of us. He just hugged her and started crying."

Bryan Randolph remained in New York City as a Red Cross volunteer for almost a year. After helping sustain the recovery crews working both Ground Zero and the Staten Island dumping ground, he helped set up facilities for the Red Cross's long-term recovery effort. On August 31, he left New York to return to Ohio University, where he is teaching a course that will certify fellow students as Red Cross disaster volunteers. He hopes to pursue a career in disaster relief. ■

*This is an adaptation of an interview conducted by Mason Anderson, a staff writer with the American Red Cross.*

editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal* (of all places) opined that mandatory service would constitute a "means for acculturation, acquainting young people with their fellow Americans of all different races, creeds, and economic backgrounds."

Those words are as compelling today as when they were written. A service program in which young people from different backgrounds work and live together would do far more than college ever could to immerse young Americans in the diversity of our country. It would also help sensitize more fortunate young men and women, at an impressionable point in their lives, to the concerns and experiences of others from different backgrounds and give them an enduring appreciation of what life is like "on the other side of the tracks."

Second, universal service could promote civic engagement, which, as Harvard social scientist Robert Putnam has persuasively argued in *Bowling Alone*, has been declining—or at least was before September 11. Some who perform service for the required period may believe their civic responsibilities will thereby be discharged, but many others are likely to develop an appreciation for helping others that could change the way they lead the rest of their lives.

Third, young people serving in a civilian capacity in particular would help satisfy unmet social needs beyond those associated with homeland security: improving the reading skills of tens of millions of Americans who cannot now read English at a high school level, cleaning up blighted neighborhoods, and helping provide social, medical, and other services to the elderly and to low-income individuals and families. Allowing individuals to delay their service until after college would enable them to bring skills to their service that could prove even more useful to society and may be a desirable option. But doing so would also reduce the benefits of added social cohesion from universal service, because it would tend to create two tiers of service, one for those who don't go to college and another for those who do.

Finally, universal service would establish firmly the notion that with rights for



Gary Fabiano/Sipa Press

ourselves come responsibilities to others. Of course, the Constitution guarantees all citizens certain rights—of free speech, of due process of law, to be free from discrimination, to vote—without asking anything of them in return. But why shouldn't citizens be required to give something to their country in exchange for the full range of rights to which citizenship entitles them?

### Countering the Objections

As Bruce Chapman makes clear in the article that follows, imposing a universal service requirement would raise serious objections aside from the philosophical one—opposition to any form of government compulsion and the temporary loss of liberty it entails.

Probably the most serious argument against universal service is its cost. Roughly 4 million students graduate from high school each year. A good benchmark for costs is the AmeriCorps program. According to official figures, the federal government spent roughly \$10,000 for each AmeriCorps volunteer in fiscal year 2001. A plausible assumption is that the states and the private sector added perhaps another \$7,000 (according to a 1995 study by the General Accounting Office, these costs amounted then to about \$5,500 per person, so they might be close to \$7,000 now). Given the relatively small numbers enrolled in AmeriCorps—about 50,000 annually—its per person costs may be higher than those for a much larger universal program, which would be able to amortize overhead costs over a much larger population. On the other hand, not all AmeriCorps volunteers live in a dormitory setting. Providing dormitories for all participants in a universal civilian program would raise the cost relative to AmeriCorps.

Balancing these factors, I assume here for illustrative purposes a per person cost of \$20,000, which, if funded entirely by the federal government, would bring the total annual gross cost of the entire program to about \$80 billion. From this figure, it would be necessary to subtract the costs of those who already serve in AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps, as

well as high school students who now volunteer for the military. In addition, some participants in a universal service program might be performing functions now carried out by paid workers. Taking all these offsets into account could bring the annual net incremental cost of the program down to, say, the \$70 billion range—still a very large number.

Given the recent dramatic deterioration of the federal budget, a program of that magnitude would seem now to be a political nonstarter, and it may well be. Nonetheless, one potentially fair way to reduce costs and thereby make the idea of universal service more palatable from a budgetary perspective would be to implement the requirement initially as a lottery, much like the system that existed toward the end of the Vietnam War. Depending on the cutoff point, the program could be sized at any level that the political traffic could bear.

However large the program could turn out to be, those who may be tempted to dismiss as too costly a universal service requirement of any size must consider its benefits. A 1995 GAO cost-benefit analysis, for example, positively evaluated the findings of a 1995 study by George R. Neumann, Roger C. Kormendi, Robert F. Tamura, and Cyrus J. Gardner that had cited quantifiable monetary benefits of \$1.68 to \$2.58 for every dollar invested in three AmeriCorps programs. These estimates did not count the nonquantifiable, but very real, benefits of strengthening local communities and fostering civic responsibility. Nor did they include the broader benefits of added social cohesion that a universal program would entail. On the other side of the ledger, it is quite possible that there would be diminishing returns to a much broader program than AmeriCorps, and thus at some enrollment level the costs of a universal requirement could exceed the benefits. But even this result—which is hardly ensured—would not credit the nonquantifiable social benefits of a broader program.

The bottom line: even a universal service program as large as \$70 billion a year could well produce social benefits in excess of that figure and thus represent a

very real net economic and social gain for American society as a whole.

Of course, the gains from universal service would be realized only if the participants were doing valuable work. And some fear that under a universal requirement, many participants in the civilian program in particular could be doing make-work (raking leaves is the image) without contributing much in the way of social value. Indeed, to the extent this happened—and some assert that it happens in the AmeriCorps program—the affected participants would come away from their service with a negative view of government and civic responsibility.

The concern is real. AmeriCorps tries to address it by decentralizing its activities, relying on both state governments and the private sector to develop programs that are essentially certified at the federal level. A civilian universal service program could work largely the same way, but on a much-expanded scale. At the same time, certain programs, especially those associated with homeland security, would have to be run out of Washington.

Still, it would be a challenge to develop meaningful work for all of the high school graduates who would enter the civilian program each year. Meeting this challenge provides another reason, besides cost, to begin the program on a less than universal scale, run it first as a lottery, and eventually expand it to a true universal system.

### An Idea Whose Time Is Coming

Universal service is an idea whose time may not be quite here, but it is coming. For reasons of need, social cohesion, and social responsibility, universal service is a compelling idea. If adopted, it could be one of the truly transformative federal initiatives of recent times, perhaps having an even greater impact on American society than the GI bill, which helped educate much of the post-World War II generation. At the very least, universal service should be on the public agenda and actively debated. The discussion alone would be a fitting postscript to the horrible events of September 11 and the continuing search for ways to engage all Americans to serve their country. ■



# A BAD IDEA WHOSE TIME IS PAST

## THE CASE AGAINST UNIVERSAL SERVICE

By Bruce Chapman

If each woman in China could only be persuaded to lower the hem of her skirt one inch, some 19th-century English merchants reasoned, the looms of Manchester could spin forever. Like that romantic calculation, the idea of universal service assumes a mythical economic and cultural system where people behave as you would like them to, with motivations of which you approve. Unlike it, universal service adds coercion to ensure compliance.

Universal service never was a good idea, and it grows worse with time. It fails militarily, morally, financially, and politically.

*Bruce Chapman, former director of the U.S. Census Bureau, deputy assistant to President Ronald Reagan, and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Organizations in Vienna, Austria, has been president of Discovery Institute since 1990. In 1967 he made an early case for an all-volunteer military in *The Wrong Man in Uniform* (Trident Press of Simon & Schuster).*



Baltmann/Corbis

For almost a century, universal service has brought forth new advocates, each desiring to enlist all youth in something. Only the justifications keep changing. Today's justification is "homeland security." But is it realistic to suggest that youth who help guard a "public or private facility" (let alone those who stuff envelopes at some charity's office) are "shouldering the burden of war" in the same way as a soldier in Afghanistan?

I don't want to attach to Robert Litan all the customary arguments that universal service advocates have been promoting for years, especially because he states that "advocating universal service before September 11 would have been unthinkable" (at least to him). Except in times of mass conflict, such as the Civil War and the two World Wars, there has never been much of a reason for universal service. Still, the varied arguments for it need to be addressed.

**Draftees for the Vietnam War are sworn into the army in Pittsburgh in 1967.**



## No Military Case

Universal service is not needed on military grounds. We eliminated the draft three decades ago in part because the armed services found that they needed relatively fewer recruits to serve longer than conscription provided. As the numbers that were needed shrank, the unfairness of the draft became ever more apparent—and offensive. Youth, ever ingenious, found ways to get deferments, decamp to Canada, make themselves a nuisance to everyone in authority—and make those who did serve feel like chumps. Many of the young people who objected to military service availed themselves of alternative service, but no one seriously believed that most "conscientious objectors" were "shouldering the burden of war" in a way comparable to those fighting in the field.

The government took advantage of its free supply of almost unlimited manpower by underpaying its servicemen, thereby losing many recruits who might have chosen a military career. Raising the pay when the volunteer force was introduced changed the incentives and—surprise—eliminated the need for the draft. The all-volunteer force has been a big success.

Leaders in today's increasingly sophisticated, highly trained military now are talking of further manpower cuts. They have no interest in short-term soldiers of any kind and give no support to a return to conscription. The idea of using universal service to round up young men and women who, instead of direct military service, could be counted on to guard a "public or private facility," as Litan proposes, is naive. In Litan's plan, youth would be obligated for only a year—slightly less, if AmeriCorps were the model. Philip Gold, a colleague at Discovery Institute and author of the post-September 11 book *Against All Terrors: This Nation's Next Defense*, points out that "if the object is fighting, a person trained only for a few months is useless. In a noncombat defense position, he would be worse than useless. He would be dangerous."

Litan's interest in compulsory service grew partly out of recent work on Israel. According to Gold, armed guards in Israel do protect day care centers, for example. But all have had serious military training and two to three years of active duty, followed by service in the active reserves. A population with widespread military training and service can accomplish things that a civilian volunteer program cannot.

Litan anticipates nothing comparable from short-term universal servicemen and -women. A one-year obligation, under the AmeriCorps example, works out to only 1,700 hours—roughly 10 months of 40-hour weeks. By the time the compulsory volunteers were trained, it would be time for them to muster out. The system would be roiled by constant turnover. It is surely unrealistic to expect to fill security jobs with youths who will be around for only a few months. Ask yourself, would you rather have a paid and trained person or a conscripted teenager inspecting the seaport for possible terrorists?

## No Moral Justification

Trying to justify universal service on moral grounds is also a mistake, and a serious one. Morally, service isn't service to the extent it is compelled. Involuntary voluntarism is like hot

snow. And allowing the pay to approach (let alone surpass) that available to ordinary workers of the same age performing the same tasks as the stipended and officially applauded “volunteers” stigmatizes the private sector. (The military recruit of today is sometimes called a volunteer only because he is not conscripted. His service is more commendable morally than that of some other paid employee because he is prepared to risk his life.)

Universal service advocates such as Litan are on especially shaky ground when charging that citizens should be “required to give something to their country in exchange for the full range of rights to which citizenship entitles them.” This cuts against the grain of U.S. history and traditions. Citizens here are expected to be law-abiding, and they are called to jury duty—and to the military if absolutely necessary. They are encouraged (not forced) to vote and to render voluntary service—which Americans famously do. But to require such service before the rights of citizenship are extended is simply contrary to the purposes for which the country was founded and has endured. The Founders had a keen awareness of the ways that the state could tyrannize the people, and taking the people’s liberty away to serve some specious government purpose unattached to national survival is a project that would horrify them.

I also raise this practical question: exactly which citizenship rights will Litan deny those people who decline to perform government-approved national service? What will be done to punish the activist who thinks he can do more to serve humanity through a political party than through prescribed government service? Or the young religious missionary who would rather save souls than guard a pier for a few months? How about—at the other end of the virtue spectrum—the young drug dealer who is only too happy to help guard the pier? Will you keep him out of the service of his choice and compel him to do rehab as his form of “service”?

Outside of mass mobilization for war—or in the special case of Israel, a small nation effectively on constant alert—the only modern nations that have conscripted labor to meet assorted, centrally decreed social purposes have been totalitarian regimes. In those lands, the object, as much as anything, has been to indoctrinate youth in the morality of the state. Litan may not have such goals in mind, but many universal service advocates want to use conscription to straighten out the next generation—to their approved standards. No doubt many—most?—think they can inculcate a sense of voluntary service through compulsory service.

In reality, however, no previous generation of youth has been so encouraged to volunteer for various approved, state-sponsored social causes. In many high schools in the United States, students cannot get a diploma without performing a certain number of hours of approved “community service.” Does a child who must perform service to graduate from high school develop a high sense of what it means to help others? Does a student who learns that almost anything counts toward the service requirement—so long as he doesn’t get paid—develop a keen sense of civil calling? Or does he hone his skill

at gaming the system? And why, if we have this service requirement in high school—and some colleges—do we need yet another one for the year after high school?

## Unintended Consequences

Universal service (indeed any national service scheme that achieves demographic heft) is a case study in unintended consequences. One surprise for liberals might be a growing disillusionment with the government and the way it wastes money. Today’s youth trust the government and are immensely patriotic, but bureaucratized service requirements could cure that. Another unintended consequence might be instruction in how government make-work is a tax on one’s freedom and an irritating distraction from education goals and serious career development. Conservatives of a sardonic nature might come to appreciate the prospect of generations growing to adulthood with firsthand experience of government’s impertinence. It would not be necessary thereafter to exhort the veterans of such unnecessary compulsion to resist the claims of government over the rest of their lives.

Universal service likewise would be an invitation to scandal. The military draft was bad enough, dispatching the budding scientist to pick up paper on a base’s roadsides and sending the sickly malcontent to deliver meal trays to patients in base hospitals. People with powerful parents got cushy posi-



Vietnam War draftees wait to be tested in Newark in 1968.

tions, while the poor got the onerous tasks. When labor is both free and abundant, it will be squandered and abused. If that was true in eras when mass armies were raised, what can one expect in a time when only a small fraction of the population is needed to operate our high-tech military?

## No Financial Justification

The cost of universal service would be prohibitive. Direct costs would include those for assembling, sorting (and sorting out), allocating, and training several million youth in an unending manpower convoy. Indirect costs include clothing and providing initial medical attention, insurance, the law enforcement associated with such large numbers (no small expense in the army, even with presumably higher discipline),



housing, and the periodic “leave” arrangements.

The \$20,000 per involuntary volunteer estimated by Litan is too low. The more realistic total figure would be more like \$27,000 to \$30,000. First, the federal cost for a full-time AmeriCorps member is about \$16,000, according to AmeriCorps officials. And that, recall, is for an average 10-month stint, so add another \$3,000 or so for a 12-month term of service. (The \$10,000 figure cited by Litan appears to average the cost of part-time volunteers with that of full-time volunteers.) Giving the involuntary volunteers the AmeriCorps education benefit of some \$4,000 brings the total to about \$23,000 of federal contribution for the full-time, one-year participant, which, with local or private match, will easily reach a total cost of some \$30,000. Few unskilled young people just out of school make that in private employment!

Because organized compulsion costs more than real volunteering, however, the indirect expenses for governments would be still greater. Chief among these are the hidden financial costs of universal national service to the economy in the form of forgone labor. That problem plagued the old draft and would be more acute now. The United States has suffered a labor shortage for most of the past two decades, with the dearth of educated and trained labor especially serious. Yet universal service advocates want to pluck out of the employment ranks some 4 million people a year and apply a com-

mand-and-control approach to their optimal use. How can we even calculate the waste?

Litan says that in 1995 the GAO “positively evaluated” a cost-benefit study of three AmeriCorps programs that found them to produce quantifiable monetary benefits of \$1.68 to \$2.58 for every dollar invested. But Litan overstates the GAO’s “positive evaluation” of the private study’s findings. The GAO study merely analyzes the methodology of the private study based on the assumptions that are baked into it. These assumptions (of future benefits and their dollar values) are inherently “problematic,” based as they are on “projected data.” And neither the GAO nor the private study whose methodology it checked says anything about the applicability of the private study to some universal service program. Inferring GAO endorsement for some putative financial benefits from a national service scheme—let alone a program of compulsory national service—is not good economics.

By contrast, a recent review of the literature and evidence of government spending by William Niskanen, former chairman of the President’s Council of Economic Advisors (under

Ronald Reagan), concluded that “the marginal cost of government spending and taxes in the United States may be about \$2.75 per additional dollar of tax revenue.” As the late Nobel economist Frederick Hayek said, “There is only one problem with socialism. It does not work.”

The cost of universal service for one year would not be \$80 billion, with certain additional economic benefits, as Litan would have it, but roughly \$120 billion, with considerable additional losses to the economy as a whole.

### No Practical or Political Worth

There is no demand for all these volunteers, as charities themselves have pointed out. Nonprofits can absorb only so many unseasoned, unskilled, short-term “volunteers,” particularly when some of the “volunteers” are reluctant, to say the least. So what is the point? Is it political?

Some universal service advocates (not Litan) have cited a January 2002 survey by Lake Snell Perry & Associates, The Tarrance Group, Inc. (The survey was conducted for the Center for Information and Research in Civic Learning & Engagement, the Center for Democracy & Citizenship, and The Partnership for Trust in Government at the Council for Excellence in Government.) The study shows strong support among youth for universal service. But these advocates usually neglect to mention that this support is based on a stated assumption in the survey question that such service would be “an alternative to (compulsory) military service should one be instituted.” A truer reflection of youthful opinion is found in the survey’s largely unreported question on community service as a requirement for high school graduation. That program is overwhelmingly opposed—by a 35 percent margin among current high school students. Interestingly, the same survey shows that “instituting civics and government course requirements in schools is favored by a 15-point margin by current high school students.”

This should tell us something. Putting \$120 billion, or even \$80 billion, into a universal national service scheme would be a waste. But how about spending some tiny corner of that money on teaching kids about real—that is, voluntary—service? How about paying to teach students about representative democracy and their part in it as voters and volunteers or about the way our economy works and how to prepare for successful participation in it? Or to teach them American history (for many, it would be a new course) in a way that inspired them with the stories of men and women, great and humble, who have rendered notable service in their communities, nation, and world.

The way to get a nation of volunteers is to showcase voluntary service, praise it, reward it, and revere it. The way to sabotage voluntary service is to coerce it, bureaucratize it, nationalize it, cloak it in political correctness, and pay for it to the point where the “volunteer” makes out better than the poor soul of the same age who works for a living. Voluntary service blesses the one who serves as well as those to whom he renders service. Universal service would be civic virtue perverted into a civic vice. ■



Universal  
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# THE POLITICS OF SERVICE

How a Nation



T

he charge from President Bill Clinton in the summer of 1995 was urgent and strong: find a way to take the new national service program, AmeriCorps, off the partisan political battlefield. Make it, like the Peace Corps, a non-partisan source of pride for all Americans.

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## Got behind AmeriCorps



Bettmann/Corbis

After the 1994 elections, the new AmeriCorps program, enacted by Congress with only a handful of Republican votes, was high on Speaker Newt Gingrich's list for termination. It had been zeroed out in the budget adopted in the House of Representatives. What Clinton called "the transcendent idea" of his administration—and the press called his "pet project"—was imperiled, and the charge to me as the new CEO of the Corporation for National Service was to help save it.

The almost-always resilient president said we could win—if he stood firm in vetoing any budget that killed AmeriCorps and if our team at the Corporation went to work with my former Senate colleagues and with the much harder-line members of the House Republican majority. My first step was to develop a close collaboration with the Points of Light Foundation established in 1990 by former President Bush—and often ridiculed by Democrats. Indeed, on the Senate floor, after the Los Angeles riots of 1992, I had said that the thousand points of light had turned into a thousand fires in Los Angeles. But I had since come to admire the work of the foundation, and an alliance with it offered the most direct way to reach out to Bush.

"Well, I never ridiculed it," Clinton said. "I thought it was the best thing Bush did." The one request Bush had made of him was to take care of

*Former Senator Harris Wofford is chairman of America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth.*

his Points of Light. And Clinton had promised to do so.

To assure Congress that AmeriCorps would be entirely nonpartisan, I pledged in the confirmation hearings to stay out of political campaigns altogether and make politics off-limits to national service participants, as in the armed forces. Eli Segal, who had launched AmeriCorps, was an outstanding and creative leader, but he had also been Clinton's campaign chairman. Key Republicans took that as a sign that the new program was an outpost of Democrats. We had to give a different signal.

### **Patriotism, Not Politics**

Why had the idea of national service become such an intensely partisan and controversial issue, and how could we reclaim it as an area of common ground? Several times in the 20th century the idea had reached high tide, and then receded, but beginning with a 1910 essay by William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," the idea had always had an aura of patriotism, not politics, around it. What was the source of the idea's recurring appeal, and why had it fallen so far out of grace in 1995?

In his first months in office, in response to the emergency of the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt persuaded Congress to establish a Civilian Conservation Corps to offer 500,000 jobless young men the opportunity to live and serve in the nation's parks and forests. The



program soon became overwhelmingly popular, surpassing Roosevelt's goal of a quarter million "boys in the woods" by the end of summer. Before going off to national service of the military kind in World War II, several million young men of the CCC had turned their lives around and made lasting contributions to the environment. The memory of that achievement lingered on through the next decades.

George H. W. Bush, John Kennedy, and many other veterans of World War II shared the idea of large-scale or universal service as a rite of passage for the young and a way of uniting the nation. The call to ask what you can do for your country became the most remembered and revered aspect of Kennedy's short-lived presidency. Though small-scale, the Peace Corps, launched by Sargent Shriver, was a symbolic embodiment of that call. In 1961, in sending the Peace Corps volunteers overseas, the president said on the White House lawn: "Some-day, we're going to bring this idea home to America."

But the Peace Corps was not born without vehement opposition. In the 1960 campaign, President Eisenhower derided Kennedy's proposal as "a juvenile experiment." Vice President Nixon likened it to "draft evasion," and others called it a "Kiddie Korps." Congress had little interest in the idea.

The surprising enthusiasm of college students, who had been dubbed the silent and apathetic generation, and the good work of the Peace Corps volunteers themselves were the keys to its success. But had Kennedy not been killed, and the Peace Corps enshrined as a central part of his legacy, it might well have become a matter of controversy in the 1964 election.

In the War on Poverty that he later organized for Lyndon Johnson, Shriver started the first domestic Peace Corps, the Volunteers in Service to America, and looked forward to hundreds of thousands of VISTA volunteers leading the assault on poverty. He aimed for similar large numbers of Foster Grandparents and participants in the Job Corps and Head Start. On George Washington's birthday in 1965, at the

University of Kentucky, President Johnson urged the nation to "search for new ways" through which "every young American will have the opportunity—and feel the obligation—to give at least a few years of his or her life to the service of others in the nation and in the world."

Those Kennedy-Johnson years were the high-water mark, in the 20th century, of the idea of making citizen service the common expectation of all Americans. Soon the war in Vietnam absorbed the resources needed for an expanding war on poverty. The number of Peace Corps volunteers fell from more than 15,000 to fewer than 5,000. The momentum toward a federally led program of national service faltered. With the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, the wind went out of the sails of that or any other such far-reaching idea.

### **Streams of Service Become a River**

During the 1970s the idea of full-time youth service percolated up from New York City and a scattering of other local communities that formed youth corps. The larger California Conservation Corps, started by Governor Jerry Brown, grew under Republican and Democratic administrations, and similar conservation corps were launched in other states in the image of the old CCC. All were viewed as nonpartisan, but few were microcosms of national service that brought young people of all racial and economic backgrounds together in common work. Most government, foundation, and corporate money targeted "at risk" young people, and the early service corps were composed largely, if not entirely, of poor and minority youth.

The 1980s also saw a large growth of volunteer centers that helped place traditional volunteers who wanted to serve a few hours a week. Former Michigan Governor George Romney was their greatest champion. Although Ronald Reagan began the decade by invoking the American spirit of service "that flows like a deep and mighty river through the history of our nation," service was not carried much further in his

administration. For those of us campaigning for large-scale, full-time national service, the river seemed more like many separate streams: state and local youth service corps programs, volunteer centers, and the civic sector's array of educational, charitable, and faith-based service organizations engaging millions of citizens in traditional voluntary service.

With the 1990s, those streams began to come together, and for a few years the river ran high. President Bush appointed the first special assistant to the president for national service, Gregg Petersmeyer. In 1990 Congress enacted the first National Service Act, which authorized funds for the Points of Light Foundation—and for a new bipartisan Commission on National and Community Service.

In negotiating a consensus bill, Senate Democrats pressed for a demonstration program of full-time national service. The White House emphasized support for traditional community volunteering. The joint bill embodied both, as well as a noncontroversial program for service learning that reflected a growing movement for student service.

In 1988, Governor Clinton had endorsed the Democratic Leadership Council's landmark report *Citizenship and National Service*, which called for national service for all who volunteered and proposed that federal college student aid be conditioned on such service. As chair of the National Governors Association, Clinton had formed a working group on national youth service. In the 1992 presidential campaign the idea clicked. Clinton found that his most popular campaign promise was to create a large-scale service corps, offering as a carrot college aid to all who served a year or more in the community.

When the 1993 National and Community Service Act emerged from intense negotiations between the White House and Congress, most of the press treated the authorization of a national service corps of 20,000 members the first year as an embarrassing falling-off from the campaign promise of a program for all who wanted to serve.

Nevertheless, the president launched

the new AmeriCorps with fanfare, and almost all governors, most of whom were Republicans, formed the bipartisan state commissions required by the act to allocate most of the positions for AmeriCorps members. During the budget crisis and government shut-down of 1995–96, however, the budget of the just-launched AmeriCorps was substantially cut. Thereafter, despite opposition by most House Republicans, the appropriations for the Corporation for National Service increased modestly each year, and the number of AmeriCorps members continued to grow.

Before his death in 1995, George Romney set in motion a plan that led to increasing Republican support. He enlisted the Corporation for National Service and the Points of Light Foundation in realizing a dream he had unsuccessfully tried to sell to three presidential administrations: a summit of all the presidents and leaders from all sectors of society and from hundreds of communities to mobilize civic and government forces to solve some of America's most urgent problems, especially those facing young people heading down the wrong track.

Romney saw the need for a large-scale domestic Peace Corps such as AmeriCorps as a cadre of leaders to help the civic sector recruit and organize what he hoped would be an ever-growing army of unpaid volunteers. He saw national service and traditional volunteers as twin engines pulling together to get things done that vitally needed to be done in every community. He argued, "If we were threatened by external forces, our resurgence would be swift and sure, centered around a full-scale mobilization of the entire nation. Our domestic problems demand no less. . . ." A summit convened and attended by all the presidents, Republicans and Democrats, would, he believed, take AmeriCorps off the partisan playing field and demonstrate the nonpartisan nature of both national service and community volunteering.

General Colin Powell accepted the chairmanship of the summit and of the ensuing nationwide campaign called "America's Promise—The Alliance for

Youth." He became an outspoken champion of AmeriCorps and the other programs of the Corporation for National Service—and thus broke the back of much of the Republican opposition. In the aftermath of the summit, Senator Dan Coates, a conservative who had voted against AmeriCorps, wrote a persuasive article, "Why I Changed My Mind on AmeriCorps."

### **Republicans Take Up the Torch**

When Clinton left office, he may not have asked the incoming president to take care of AmeriCorps, but he knew that in Texas, Governor Bush had supported the work of his state's national service commission (though he seldom used the controversial word "AmeriCorps"). Clinton was delighted that 49 governors, including those of Texas and Florida, signed a letter circulated by Montana Governor Marc Racicot that supported reauthorizing and strengthening AmeriCorps.

Most supporters of national service were nonetheless anxious about the future of AmeriCorps in a Republican administration—until Leslie Lenkowsky was nominated and confirmed as the new CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Lenkowsky had served diligently and constructively both on the board of former President Bush's 1990 commission and on the board of the corporation, nominated by Clinton in 1993.

Bush also recommended Stephen Goldsmith, the former mayor of Indianapolis and a close campaign associate, as chair of the corporation's board and later picked Racicot to be chair of the Republican National Committee. Both shared George Romney's vision of national and community service, and Racicot had taken Powell's place as chairman of America's Promise.

In his campaign for president, John McCain surprised his fellow Republicans by announcing he had been wrong about AmeriCorps—and wrong not to say so sooner. When McCain enlisted Democratic Senator Evan Bayh and, later, House Democrat Harold Ford, Jr., to call for an increase of AmeriCorps to 250,000 members within five years, no one could

foresee that President Bush would join in the bidding. Budgetary limits alone would presumably hold him back.

September 11 changed that. With the assaults on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, the challenge by outside forces that George Romney had imagined came to pass, and a new reality began. In his 2002 State of the Union address, Bush called for 4,000 hours, or two years, of service by every American and asked for a doubling of the Peace Corps and a 50 percent increase in AmeriCorps in one year, from 50,000 to 75,000 members.

Since then, President Bush has renewed that call in visits and talks around the country and at White House conferences. The Citizen Service Act of 2002 has been approved by the very House committee that had been a bastion of opposition to AmeriCorps and is supported by the leading former opponent, Congressman Peter Hoekstra. To drive his call to service, the president created the USA Freedom Corps Council, a cabinet-level council that he chairs, and selected John Bridgeland to direct it. At the council table are AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, the newly created Citizens Corps for national emergencies, run by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the secretaries of the appropriate federal departments.

For some of us who witnessed the origins of the Peace Corps, Bridgeland calls to mind the early Sargent Shriver. And though some of us may disagree with President Bush on tax cuts, environmental decisions, or foreign policy, his determination to build national and community service as a major institution of the civic sector is a common ground on which a large majority of Americans can come together.

For George W. Bush to be the president who presides over the largest quantum leap in national service is not the equivalent of Nixon going to China. But for the president, the secretary of state, and the head of the Republican party to lead the way in national and community service is taking that party on a new journey.

Quo vadis? ■



By John M. Bridgeland, Stephen Goldsmith,  
and Leslie Lenkowsky

# New Directions

Service and the Bush Administration's Civic Agenda



From his first major speech as a presidential candidate, in Indianapolis in July 1999, George W. Bush has made expanding civic engagement and increasing the strength and effectiveness of civic institutions a central aim. He articulated his vision for an active and engaged citizenry in his inaugural address, in which he urged Americans to be “citizens, not spectators; citizens, not subjects; responsible citizens, building communities of service and a nation of character.”

The events of September 11 added energy and urgency to this goal, as an active citizenry became an important bulwark against terrorist threats. These policy aims took their most concrete form in the 2002 State of the Union address, when President Bush called on all Americans to devote at least two years—or 4,000 hours—over their lifetimes in service to their communities, nation, and world. The president announced he had created the USA Freedom Corps to promote and coordinate government and private-sector efforts to give Americans more meaningful service opportunities to answer that call. As part of the USA Freedom Corps he also formed Citizen Corps to help citizens play appropriate roles in meeting the nation’s emerging homeland defense needs and called for expanding the Peace Corps, Senior Corps, and AmeriCorps.

The president’s embrace of national service programs, while springing directly from his philosophy of compassionate conservatism, no doubt surprised many people who had come to associate such efforts with Democratic presidents. Few people dispute that the voluntary efforts of citizens can make neighborhoods safer, the environment cleaner, children more prepared to face life’s challenges, seniors healthier, and communities better able to deal with emergencies. But the challenge for many has been to define the role government ought to play in this arena. Can federally funded service be administered in a way that protects the independence of the civic sector and ensures that citizens, rather than government, take responsibility for the health and safety of their neighborhoods and their nation?

### Government and the Voluntary Sector

A long tradition in American politics warns against allowing government to encroach on the private sector. No less a student of American democracy than Alexis de Tocqueville warned that the growth of government could weaken the American tradition of joining civic groups. In the 1950s, sociologist Robert Nisbet, among others, lamented the decline of community, blaming it on the destructive effects of an expanding welfare state. Recently, a host of figures, especially Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone*, have warned that

Americans are reaching dangerous levels of civic disengagement, one measure of which is declining interest in volunteering and civic associations.

Not until 1965, however, did many thinkers who were concerned about government encroachment on the voluntary sector begin to develop a positive agenda for the diffuse web of nonprofit groups, associations, schools, and community organizations that came to be known as the “independent sector.” Chief among them was Richard Cornuelle, a businessman and political activist, who in his 1965 book, *Reclaiming the American Dream*, challenged the right to demonstrate how private, nonprofit organizations could successfully tackle tasks such as making a college education affordable to the lower and middle classes, reducing poverty and welfare dependency, and improving housing for the needy. Could developing an agenda for the independent sector, he asked, offer a way to address pressing public needs without expanding government?

A decade later, two scholars from the American Enterprise Institute, Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, set out such an agenda. They urged government to make better use of “mediating structures”—neighborhood, family, church, and voluntary associations—to deal with social problems. In their widely discussed “To Empower People,” they set forth two propositions: first, that government policy should stop harming these mediating structures and, second, that it should use them whenever possible to realize social purposes.

During Governor Bush’s campaign for the presidency, his support for mediating structures and the people they mobilize—now termed “armies of compassion”—figured prominently. He proposed to clear away legal and bureaucratic obstacles, thereby allowing the federal government to provide support to grassroots groups, exactly the kind of mediating institutions that Berger and Neuhaus had in mind.

In Bush’s vision, federal service programs fill a special niche—they create more opportunities for people to volunteer. Through AmeriCorps, for example, the intensive commitment members make—up to 40 hours a week for one or two years—would be directed to helping organizations locate, train, and mobilize the armies of compassion.

### September 11 and Service

In the fall of 2001, the administration was hoping to advance its strategy for citizen engagement through a “Communities of Character” initiative. The president was planning to spotlight places across the nation where people voluntarily came together to solve problems, putting others’ interests above their own. The attacks on September 11 made that effort superfluous. Communities across the United States sent medical and relief teams to New York and Washington, while millions of ordinary citizens donated blood and money. “What can I do to help?” became an almost universal refrain, making citizenship and service more important than ever. In response, the president announced plans to increase the role of AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps volunteers in public safety, public health, and disaster relief and to focus their efforts more sharply on homeland security.

*John M. Bridgeland is assistant to President Bush and director of the Office of USA Freedom Corps. Stephen Goldsmith, chairman of the board of directors of the Corporation for National and Community Service and special adviser to President Bush on faith-based and not-for-profit initiatives, is the author of Putting Faith in Neighborhoods. Leslie Lenkowsky is CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service.*

In his 2002 State of the Union message, the two halves of the Bush administration's civic agenda came together. Toward the end of an address devoted chiefly to the war against terrorism, homeland security, and the economy, the president called on all Americans to devote at least two years during their lifetimes to serving their neighbors and their nation. Acts of goodness and compassion in one's community, he argued, would be an appropriate way of responding to the "evils" of September 11. And he proposed changes in national service programs to enable more Americans to serve both through these programs and through the grassroots organizations they would support.

These proposals represent a new direction in national and community service. To begin with, they put to rest the idea—which has gained currency in the aftermath of September 11—that national and community service should be made mandatory. Whether in AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, or in private organizations, service, the president said, was to continue to be a voluntary, individual, moral commitment.

The proposed reforms also make clear that service through the federal government is to strengthen, not replace, traditional volunteering. The president anticipated that most Americans would answer his "call to service" by continuing to devote a few hours a week to work with a local church, school, hospital, or nonprofit. But federal programs like AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps would be available for those who wanted an intensive volunteer experience at home or abroad. The president also directed various cabinet departments to explore ways to encourage more Americans to volunteer and to remove any barriers to participation.

### **A New Role for Federal Service**

In the administration's vision of national service, participants take on tasks different from those performed by ordinary volunteers. Volunteerism is not free, in the sense that volunteers must be recruited, organized, and set to work. To make more effective the efforts of millions of individual volunteers, who come to the table with all types of skills, abilities, and experiences, someone has to organize volunteer opportunities so that they meet concrete and clearly defined human needs. The organizations mobilizing the "armies of compassion" need corporals and sergeants—precisely the role that this administration sees for national service participants. Whether in education, the environment, public health, elder care, or strengthening homeland security, their long-term commitment is of special value to charities and public agencies, which can count on them to show up each day, receive training, and take on long-range tasks and responsibilities that ordinary volunteers cannot—something known in the nonprofit world as "capacity building." That difference also justifies paying some of them a small stipend for living expenses, as well as a GI bill-type award for education.

Habitat for Humanity already follows this approach. It uses AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps volunteers to recruit, manage, and organize the traditional volunteers on which it relies to build homes for low-income people. Habitat

founder Millard Fuller—once skeptical of AmeriCorps, but now an enthusiastic supporter—reports that volunteer leveraging by AmeriCorps members serving with Habitat has helped the group build 2,000 extra homes and engage more than 250,000 new volunteers. AmeriCorps members working with Habitat do not replace the volunteers who are building the houses; instead, they help recruit them from college campuses and elsewhere. They also ready the building sites so that when the hammer-swinging volunteers show up, they can get right to work and have a more productive experience. Along with helping Habitat build more houses, AmeriCorps participants thus engage more Americans in civic activities.

Another version of this model is to use AmeriCorps members to build the administrative and technological capacities of grassroots groups. For example, since it was created in 1965, members of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), who now make up about 15 percent of AmeriCorps members, have focused their efforts on mobilizing and managing teams of volunteer counselors, developing or expanding programs, and implementing administrative and accounting systems. Those efforts equip nonprofits—or voluntary public health or disaster relief groups—to do more of the work they already do. This fall, for example, VISTA will fund 10 members to work with Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) at strategic points around the country, helping to develop SIFE teams that will teach financial literacy, from balancing checkbooks to investment strategies, to underprivileged populations in inner cities. The VISTA members won't do the actual teaching; rather, they will expand the program by training and developing new teams.

Implementing these strategies requires changing not only how federal service programs have been run, but also the laws establishing them. While VISTA members, for example, are allowed to do a wide range of capacity-building activities, other AmeriCorps participants, governed by rules enacted in the 1990s, are now required by law to provide services (such as tutoring or health care) directly to clients. Changes to allow national service participants to perform a wider range of services were incorporated in a set of principles for a Citizen Service Act, which the Bush administration unveiled last spring. The bill, which includes reforms to mobilize more volunteers who receive nothing from government, to make organizations receiving support more effective and accountable, and to remove barriers to participation in service programs, is now before Congress.

Finally, the president will use his new White House council, the USA Freedom Corps, to promote the health of the voluntary sector in general. The council will not only coordinate the efforts of all volunteer and service programs in the federal tent, but also concern itself with federal policies that affect the well-being of civil society. For example, it can work across federal agencies to improve the effectiveness of school tutoring programs that help students in need. And it can encourage organizations—businesses and nonprofits alike—to respond to the president's call to service by making institutional changes, such as giving employees paid time off for ser-



vice, enlisting consumers in volunteer service activities, and increasing the capacity of service providers to use volunteers. For the first time, at the highest levels of our government, a presidential council will develop an agenda of "citizenship, service, and responsibility."

The USA Freedom Corps will link citizens with service opportunities in their communities. In July, the president unveiled a redesigned website ([www.usafreedomcorps.gov](http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov)) that features the USA Freedom Corps Volunteer Network, the largest clearinghouse of volunteer opportunities ever created. Thanks to an unprecedented collaboration among many government agencies, for-profit companies, nonprofit organizations, and private foundations, Americans can now find volunteer opportunities anywhere in the country (and even abroad) with just a few clicks of the mouse. The effort represents the power of government to rally diverse (and sometimes competitive) groups to a higher and shared purpose—and offers a glimpse of the public-private partnerships that are possible when government promotes service.

Since the president's call to service, interest in volunteer and national service is up. Key indicators include the increase in the numbers of citizens being matched with local service opportunities, as well as traffic at web sites for the USA Freedom Corps and the recruitment websites of Senior Corps and AmeriCorps, where applications have more than doubled. The Peace Corps also reports steady increases in applications. Nonprofit organizations, businesses, schools, faith-based groups, and other institutions are stepping forward to answer the call to service with new commitments and, in many cases, institutional changes that promise to foster a culture of service for years to come.

### Service and Cultural Renewal

The Bush administration's civic agenda, together with its reform of national service, represents an unprecedented, cross-sector push to reconnect Americans to their communities and their country—and a new direction in how government views its role in strengthening the voluntary sector. Instead of bemoaning the decline of American mediating institutions, the administration seeks public actions to reinvigorate them. In an era of a high-tech, low-manpower military, it also looks for ways to involve as many Americans as possible in serving their country during a time of war and to encourage institu-



tional changes at every level to ensure that volunteer service remains strong in times of peace. It aims to provide avenues for Americans, especially young adults and senior citizens able to offer sustained volunteer service, to dedicate themselves to reaching out and ministering to the needy and suffering. The president's service agenda clearly reflects the belief that citizens who are closest to the needs of people in local communities are best positioned to bring hope and help to those most needing it and that a renewed effort is needed to mobilize more Americans into volunteer service.

In identifying national and community service as a force for institutional and cultural renewal, the Bush administration has begun to make it an idea that Americans of all political stripes can embrace.



# At Work for America's

## The Labor Community and National Service

By Andrew L. Stern

To make a real difference, initiatives for national service and civic participation must not be limited to recent college graduates or retirees who are able to volunteer their time or work for subsistence wages. Working together, unions, employers, and government can increase opportunities for participation by low-income workers who would add diversity to the ranks of national service and benefit from the learning experience that civic participation provides.

*Andrew L. Stern is president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the largest and fastest-growing union in the AFL-CIO. SEIU represents health care workers, public service employees, and building service and security workers.*

The 1.5 million members of the Service Employees International Union serve our nation every day. They care for the sick as nurses and doctors, nursing assistants and medical technicians, home care and nursing home workers. They protect workplace health and safety as security officers and janitors. They work in children's services, law enforcement, environmental protection. A true national service initiative could unleash their talent and energy.

One way to expand civic participation would be to designate election day as "National Citizenship Day" and require employers to provide a paid holiday to encourage working people to vote and perform community service as

**A group of immigrants celebrates after taking the nationalization oath to become U.S. citizens on July 3, 2002, in Fishers, Indiana.**



# Workers

local Election Board poll workers or on behalf of nonpartisan election day activities. Unions already help workers register and vote, without regard to political affiliation. But many workers cannot find time to vote, let alone participate in other civic life and community service. Many are holding down two or three jobs to make ends meet. In nearly two-thirds of married-couple households with children, both parents are working. Mandatory overtime keeps many on the job well beyond the eight-hour day. Meanwhile, most working families are scrambling to piece together child care and elder care and to secure health care. If the United States is to be a nation “of the people” and “by the people,” working families need time set aside when they can choose elected leaders and the policies they will be pledged to carry out.

Millions of the hardest-working people in America today are recent immigrants. They harvest and serve our food, care for our children and our sick, and build and clean our homes and offices—yet their legal status keeps them on the fringe of our communities. Unions are often immigrants’ entry point into civic life. We help them achieve living wages, affordable health care, and career ladders. We provide English classes so that workers can improve their job status and better understand their adopted country. But hard-working, taxpaying immigrant workers cannot become full participants in this country without a national commitment to legalization.

Not so long ago, President Bush was an outspoken advocate for providing a clear and achievable pathway to citizenship. After September 11, he and others backed off that conversation with the American people, but it is now time to resume it. National service by itself is not an answer to legalization, but it could be part of a

renewed discussion about the need to acknowledge the contributions immigrants make to American society. Why not make a two-year commitment to national service one pathway to legalization? Union leaders and employers together could identify eligible current and future workers for screening by appropriate authorities. After legal checks, undocumented workers (and legal immigrants who are more than two years away from citizenship) could participate in national service jobs and gain credit toward legal status and, ultimately, citizenship. During their service, workers could attend English and citizenship classes.

The nation could also benefit from a concerted program to give workers who have been convicted of a felony an opportunity to reenter society. More than 3.8 million people who have been convicted of a felony are denied voting rights and full participation in our communities. Some states have passed laws that allow reinstatement of full citizenship after release, parole, and probation periods. Why not find appropriate national service opportunities to enable these men and women to earn credits toward restoration of full citizenship at the same time that they gain work experience and new skills?

Establishing a National Citizenship Day on election day, rewarding hard-working immigrants, and reintegrating those who have served time for past crimes are just three ways to expand national service and civic participation programs to include working people. If we are going to achieve the mission of the Corporation for National and Community Service to “foster civic responsibility, strengthen the ties that bind us together as a people, and provide educational opportunity for those who make a substantial commitment to service,” working people must be part of the process. ■

DOING  
WELL

DOING  
GOOD

By Jeff Swartz

am the third generation of my family to run The Timberland Company. My grandfather was an immigrant to this country. A man of few words, big dreams, real values, he built boots, the same ones we market today all over the world. And he taught his sons, and they taught me, what it takes to run a business or to live a purposeful life—a commitment to humility, humanity, integrity, and excellence. These values are the cornerstone of how we now live our business life in the global economy.

At Timberland, doing well and doing good are not separate or separable efforts. Every day, everywhere, we compete in the global economy. At the center of our efforts is the premise of service, service to a truth larger than self, a demand more pressing even than this quarter’s earnings. While we are absolutely accountable to our shareholders, we also recognize and accept our responsibility to share our strength—to work, in the context of our for-profit business, for the common good. For me, service is about The Work—doing The Work, working to perfect the universe. That such

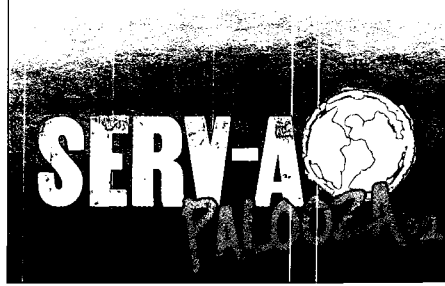
*Jeff Swartz is president and CEO of The Timberland Company.*



an aspiration, normally housed in a faith construct, can be applied in a day-to-day business is the beauty of service for me at Timberland. I can be on mission for the shareholder and the customer and on Mission at the same time.

Understanding the role of service in perfecting the universe was not an intellectual experience for me. It was visceral. I received a letter one day, the standard, well-intended plea for charity from yet another worthy nonprofit. This one, City Year, was an urban peace corps of sorts, starting up in Boston, near where I live. The letter described 50 young people, out to save the world, lacking only boots for their feet. Would I send along the boots?

Who knows why I did or why the cofounder of City Year decided to come to my office and challenge me to spend four hours doing community service with him and a small group of young leaders near our headquarters in New Hampshire. But I sent the boots, Alan Khazei paid the visit, and I accepted the challenge to serve. And I found myself,



not a mile from our headquarters, face to face with the stories you read in the newspaper, face to face with a vision for America not unlike the one that drew my grandfather to leave Russia in steerage so many years ago. I spent four hours with the corps members from City Year and some young recovering drug addicts in a group home. I painted some walls and felt the world shaking under my feet. In America? At this time of plenty? Children on drugs?

Behind my desk again, safe no longer, moved by my own sense of purpose having served, albeit briefly, all that mattered was figuring out how service could become part of daily life at Timberland. Each of the 10 of us who served that day had our own personal transformation. So we worked together to create the Path of Service.

Formally launched in 1992, the Path of Service galvanized the spirit of volunteerism and citizenship that permeates our company. It engages the skills and talents of employees to create long-term solutions for critical community needs, but also to go beyond what we do on days of service to determine how we act each day—with and for shareholders, customers, employees, and communities. The Path of Service is the canvas on which our ideals and beliefs are expressed. As Marian Wright Edelman wrote, “Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time.”

In 1997, we expanded the Path of Service and founded Serv-a-Palooza, an annual celebration of community and service that unites employees, vendors, community partners, and youth from our home community and 20 nations worldwide in a day of transformational service. For one full day each May, the sun never sets on Timberland employees’ service. How is that for an alternative definition of globalization? With passion, innovation, and a singular sense of purpose, Team Timberland has sought to improve our communities and the condition of those beside whom we live and work. And we have benefited. We have been given wisdom, humility, and a stronger sense of justice.

If the United States is to establish a national service agenda, however, Corporate America as a whole must take action. I recently joined a group of 17 other corporate leaders representing a variety of industries to create Businesses Strengthening America—a long-term effort to engage hundreds of America’s business leaders in helping corporations, employees, and consumers answer President Bush’s State of the Union call to service. The premise of Businesses Strengthening America is that a strong commitment to volunteering and civic responsibility serves corporate interests as well as community, national, and global needs by increasing employee productivity and employee, consumer, and shareholder loyalty.

Our company is organized around values. Not out of convenience, but out of necessity. ■

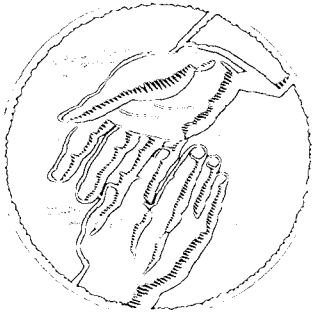
Timberland employees work at projects around the globe as part of Serv-a-Palooza, the company’s annual worldwide day of service. In 2002, employees volunteered more than 16,000 hours to nonprofit organizations in their communities.



Courtesy of Timberland



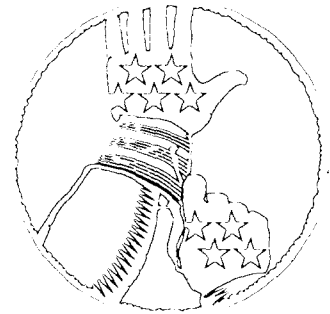
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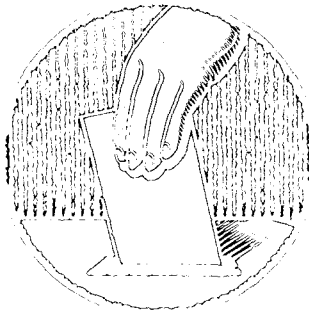
SERVICE IN THE PURSUIT  
OF SOCIAL JUSTICE



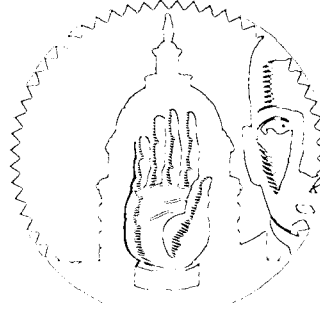
EMPOWERING  
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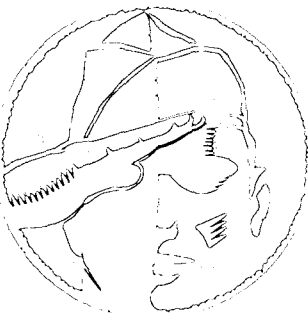
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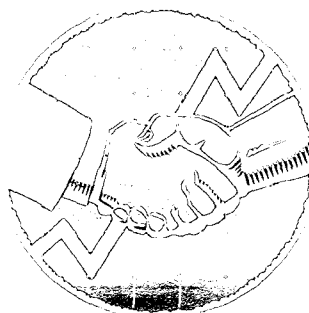
FIRST VOTE



ELLIOT RICHARDSON  
PRIZE FOR PUBLIC  
SERVICE



MILITARY  
SERVICE



PROFITS THROUGH  
PRINCIPLES

## Service in the Pursuit of Social Justice

By Daniel Blumenthal

*Daniel Blumenthal is chairman of the Department of Community Health and Preventive Medicine at the Morehouse School of Medicine.*

In 1969–70, as the only physician in VISTA, I was assigned to Lee County, Arkansas, a county of 16,000 people in the Mississippi River Delta. Said to be the seventh poorest county in the nation, Lee was 60 percent black, 70 percent poor, and virtually untouched by the civil rights movement. It was an unreconstructed, segregated piece of the "Old South."

About 30 VISTA volunteer "Health Advocates" were assigned to five counties of eastern Arkansas that year, with seven dispatched to Lee. Those seven included my wife (a child



psychologist), a nurse, and four recent college graduates trained briefly in health-related areas such as nutrition as well as in community organizing. Together, we set up four grassroots “Community Action Councils” and, with the help of a small federal grant, a community-controlled health center, the Lee County Cooperative Clinic. Our goal was to provide

health care to the poor (who desperately needed it), but, even more important, to offer them some sense of empowerment—that is, the ability to control resources such as health care rather than having to rely on charity. The clinic was run by a board of directors elected by the patients, who were considered members of the clinic cooperative.

White resistance to the clinic and to VISTA’s organizing efforts was formidable. The four-member medical staff of the county’s 25-bed hospital denied me admitting privileges. We were unable to house the clinic at any white-owned property. When the black funeral parlor director finally rented us a five-room house, the county’s government tried to block our federal grant. The struggle gained media attention, with front-page stories in major newspapers and features on national television.

The conflict mobilized Lee’s poor and African-American population and transformed the county. A black political organization spun off from the action councils and offered the first black candidates for local public office since Reconstruction. Blacks demanding economic justice boycotted white-owned businesses; students demanding educational justice boycotted the public schools. Buildings were burned and shots fired. Miraculously, no one was killed or injured.

Today, all that is history. Lee County government is integrated. The clinic put up its own building in 1972 and has been a member of the county Chamber of Commerce for many years. The hospital has long since closed, as have most rural hospitals of its size. Marianna, the county seat, now has a biracial workforce but could hardly be called prosperous. The county’s poverty rate has dropped to a “mere” 38 percent.

And I have been gone from eastern Arkansas for more than 30 years. For the past 21, I have taught public health and supervised the public health faculty at the Morehouse School of Medicine. Public health is that branch of the health professions that tries to ensure that all kids are immunized, everybody has access to safe water and food, everybody gets screened for cancer and high blood pressure and, ultimately, somehow, that everybody has access to health care. The key word is “everybody.” We like to say that “public health is social justice.”

Striving for social justice comes naturally to Morehouse, a predominantly African-American medical school. Blacks still have the poorest health indices in the United States, and few blacks have been trained as public health professionals.

As a volunteer in Lee County, I had the privilege of working for a more just society, of helping to change the conditions that kept people in poverty and denied them their basic rights.

In another way, I have the same privilege now. Many of my fellow VISTA volunteers were not so fortunate; their duties were to drive people to the welfare office or distribute used clothing or the like. Those jobs constitute service, to be sure, and they need to be done, but in the long run, they don’t change anything. Many volunteers who were doing that sort of work in 1970 felt a sense of frustration and often failed to complete their year in VISTA.

Sometimes today I am asked to address groups of VISTA volunteers, now known as AmeriCorps VISTAs. My message is always the same: see what you can do to change the world. Social justice is no longer an explicit focus of VISTA, so my message is a bit subversive. But it is the same message that I would give anybody who undertakes service, as a volunteer or for a living. ■

## Military Service

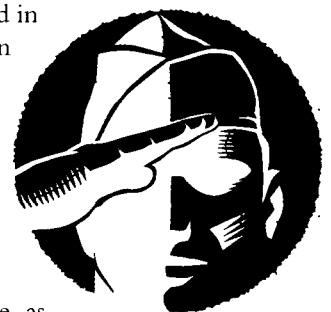
By Louis Caldera

*Louis Caldera is vice chancellor for university advancement for the California State University system. He was secretary of the army from 1998 to 2001 and managing director and chief operating officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service from 1997 to 1998.*

Military service can be a transformative life experience. It was for me, and it continues to be so for today’s young servicemen and women. As young Americans consider their options for national and community service today, however, military service is rarely even on the agenda. What must we do to increase the interest of our young people in serving their country in uniform?

I volunteered to serve driven by the immigrant spirit to give something back to the country that had given so much to my family and to me. Bookish, shy, a sheltered son of struggling, Spanish-speaking parents, I knew little of the world outside my own cloistered neighborhood. The military, with its emphasis on leadership development, moral and physical courage, and command presence and voice, opened my eyes to the vast possibilities of life. I learned that the world had much more to offer me than I had ever imagined and that no doors were closed to me except the ones I chose not to open. Our mission in the army—to be prepared to defend the nation and to serve wherever called in support of our nation’s interests in the world—gave me a deeper appreciation for the forces, events, and people that shape the world we live in. Inchoate notions of duty, service, and citizenship began to become tangible and permanent.

Throughout my recent tenure as



secretary of the army, I heard young men and women express what service means to them. Often deployed far from home, they would say there was no place they would rather be, because they knew they were making a difference. Whether helping to save lives and leading recovery efforts in Central America after Hurricane Mitch or preventing genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina, they could palpably feel the gratitude of those for whom their presence and aid meant hope for a better life for themselves and for their children. Standing watch on the world's hot spots or training to deploy there if necessary, they knew that what they were prepared to do was essential to protecting our nation. These young people did not come, by and large, from America's most privileged families. Yet they were the ones who had internalized the sense that we are abundantly blessed as Americans and called, out of our own principles and enlightened self-interest, to lead and to help others in places riven by hatred and calamity.

Why does military service not figure more prominently in calls for a renewed commitment to service? In part, it is the benign result of the structure of such service initiatives as AmeriCorps and America's Promise, which address urgent domestic needs. In part, it results from the end of the draft a generation ago: relatively few parents, teachers, and other role models of today have ever worn the uniform of our country. It may also come from misconceptions about the nature of modern military service, discomfort with the fundamental role of the military, lingering suspicion and hostility arising from an antiwar movement that spanned three decades, and unhappiness with current policies toward openly gay service members. Whatever the reasons, few adults challenge today's young people to consider serving their country in uniform.

President Bush has included the military in his recent national service proposals, but creating new opportunities for military service that parallel civilian service will not be easy. The military itself has struggled to find ways to embrace the concept of more young people serving shorter tours of duty without compromising the requirements of military cohesiveness and readiness, particularly in the era of the high-tech battlefield. Today's recruitment and training costs are high. Because service members often train for a year or more before arriving at their first unit, the military services prefer four- to six-year enlistment contracts and put a premium on retaining skilled careerists. Moreover, high personnel turnover at the unit level degrades unit cohesiveness. Teams never quite gel as new recruits keep moving in and out of the ranks. Trainers and leaders rarely get to hone higher-order team competencies as they constantly work to rebuild basic ones. So it will not be as simple as mandating shorter tour options—a proposal that many in the military suspect will bring into the ranks soldiers who are not really committed to the proposition that they must train as if war is imminent and that they will be the ones to fight it.

Despite these difficulties, we should try to create some workable opportunities for shorter-term military service, and we should work with employers, educators, and government leaders to create an enhanced framework of realistic enlistment and reenlistment incentives. Above all, we should make military

service an important part of the national conversation about the obligations and benefits of service. Young Americans deserve to know about this opportunity to see firsthand our country's principles put into action, to work with people of all backgrounds and walks of life, to challenge themselves to live by the high standards the military demands of those who respond to the call of duty. For them, as for me and for so many others, military service can be the foundation for a lifelong commitment to public service and the source of a deep appreciation for the importance of civic engagement in a democracy. ■

## First Vote

By Jane Eisner

*Jane Eisner is a columnist for the Philadelphia Inquirer.*

If democracy is America's civic religion, then voting is communion on Easter Sunday, the lighting of Hanukkah candles, the fast of Ramadan rolled into one. It is the ritual we all can share.

When my children were younger, I'd insist they partake in this ceremony of civic life and accompany me when I voted, but it became harder to corral them the older they grew. Then, on a Tuesday this past May, my oldest daughter was eligible to vote for the first time, and I had a powerful, disturbing revelation. Almost no one made a fuss.

Oh, the poll workers, bless them, clapped when they learned this was her initial venture. But society did nothing else to encourage her to vote or to mark the occasion. This induction into the central act of citizenship that millions have died to achieve and maintain was greeted by a collective yawn.

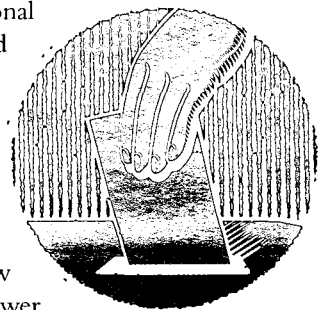
Other rites of passage are met by great fanfare. We capture a child's first step with documentary-sized videos. We spend hundreds on prom dresses, thousands on bar mitzvah parties. We all but break a bottle of champagne over the first car.

Yet the first vote is welcomed as enthusiastically as a chemistry test on a rainy Monday. No wonder that in the cliffhanger 2000 presidential election, only 26.7 percent of 18-year-olds reported voting.

This the generation that is gravitating toward national service in record numbers has still not made the connection between service to the community and participation in the very process that governs community life.

The link is essential. As the national service movement strengthens and matures, it must produce more than individual fulfillment for those involved and temporary assistance for communities in need.

Why else serve? John Bridge-land, executive director of the new USA Freedom Corps, tried to answer





the question last June in Philadelphia, at City Year's annual convention. "Service is a duty associated with living in free society," he said. Service is a way to show love of country, and in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, to protect the homeland.

All true. It is even part of a happy life—and studies prove it.

But national service must be more than that. It must lead to an appetite for substantive change, a commitment to address the social problems that have created the need for service in the first place. As Ira Harkavy, a University of Pennsylvania professor who has long championed community partnerships, said recently: "It's not enough to serve soup in a soup kitchen. We have to work toward ending the conditions that make people hungry."

National service is a means to an end—a point, sadly, too often lost in the dreamy exhortations of this newly popular crusade. It ought not to stand above or away from the political arena; at its best, it can lead to a mass movement for active citizenship and structural reform.

Bravo to all who volunteer in overcrowded, understaffed public schools. But when the volunteers go home, the debilitating conditions remain. National service will truly be service to the nation if it produces a cadre of informed leaders committed to improving the nation's schools. Or at the very least, to voting in the next school board election.

I can think of no better way to forge that link than to promote the First Vote, to indeed celebrate what we value. Between now and the next election day, I urge parents, teachers, coaches, and other caring adults to create their own First Vote ritual for newly minted voters to publicly acknowledge this civic coming-of-age. I imagine something with the feel of an Aaron Copland symphony, a Frank Capra film, a poem by Maya Angelou.

If an 18-year-old is in the army or away at college, send a celebratory package. If she's home, take her out for coffee, buy her flowers or a keepsake book.

High schools should laud students who vote. Employers should offer them time to participate. Neighbors should shake their hands. Those blustery radio stations my kids listen to incessantly should read off the names of first-time voters. Applause, attention—all that is due them.

"I hear America singing," Walt Whitman wrote in the slim volume of poetry I gave my daughter to commemorate her First Vote. Touched as she was, I don't pretend that she'll run home every day to read it. I don't pretend, either, that 15 minutes in a voting booth on a brisk Tuesday morning will mark a turning point in a young life. I'm just glad she was awake.

But I do believe that one day she'll open the pages of Whitman's extraordinary celebration of American life and understand the connection. When Whitman heard the "varied carols" of America singing—the mechanics and masons, shoemakers and sewers, "singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs"—I am certain he heard the sounds of a people who cared enough about their destiny to spend a few minutes once or twice a year in a voting booth.

A people who understand that it is not enough to feel good, but to do good. To serve, but also to vote. To fix, but also to change. ■

# Profits through Principles

By Robert D. Haas

*Robert D. Haas is chairman of the board of Levi Strauss & Co.*

By the time I graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1964, young people nationwide were galvanized to serve. It was a golden age of service, prompted in part by President Kennedy's well-known call to action in his 1961 inaugural address.

Like many others, I joined the Peace Corps—then headed to the rural village of Adzope in the Ivory Coast of Africa. My experience there teaching English and getting a public health project off the ground taught me to make the most out of opportunities to bring about positive change, a lesson I have carried with me throughout my business life. It reinforced a commitment to community involvement that goes back through generations of my family.

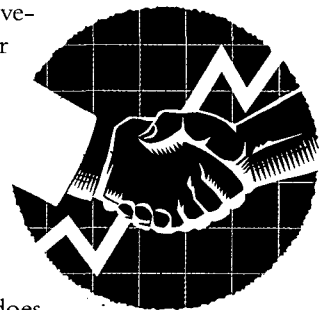
My great-great-granduncle, Levi Strauss, was a merchant and a philanthropist, a civic-minded business leader who believed deeply in community service. In fact, throughout our company's 149-year history, business and corporate citizenship have been linked as one. This principle of "responsible commercial success" has endured in good times and bad and continues to anchor our beliefs and behaviors today. It is one of the reasons consumers trust our brands and company.

Today, American business faces a crisis of trust. Consumers have been barraged with news accounts of egregious corporate misconduct. Allegations of dishonesty, subterfuge, and executive greed have triggered government investigations, indictments, and company bankruptcies. Public trust of business has collapsed to levels not seen since the early 1900s.

Increasingly, consumers are holding corporations accountable not only for their products and services, but also for how they are made and marketed. Consumers want more than growth in shareholder value from business; they also expect good corporate citizenship. Great brands and businesses are built through a combination of two things: continuously providing superior products and services and earning the trust of consumers, employees, and the communities in which they operate. This is the formula for sustained business success.

Since September 11, Americans are expressing more interest in civic involvement and trust in one another and their government. According to Robert Putnam, the chronicler of trends in U.S. civic engagement, "In the aftermath of September's tragedy, a window of opportunity has opened for a sort of civic renewal that occurs only once or twice in a century."

This upswing in civic attitudes does



not include greater trust of business. Knowing this, business has a timely opportunity—as well as a responsibility—to help shape society by modeling ethical conduct and civic engagement. Integrity means more than mere compliance with the law. It means “doing the right thing” through a range of responsible business practices, including increased transparency, outstanding workplace practices, exemplary environmental stewardship, generous philanthropic support, and more.

On a local level, businesses can help their workers become more engaged in the community. Employees want to do this, but are often hamstrung by the demands of their time-starved lives. Companies can conduct volunteer days, when teams of employees work together on community improvement projects; provide matching grants to employee contributions; and create a culture where senior leadership demonstrates the importance of community service. In return, businesses can attract and hold superior talent, improve employee morale, and generate community goodwill.

Internationally, U.S. multinational companies can play a progressive role as well. Business and communities prosper in America because of free markets and a democratic society. In diverse marketplaces around the world, business leaders can model the best of what America stands for—freedom, opportunity, and compassion. Corporate leaders must stand up for human rights and freedom of association; encourage responsible open trade and environmental stewardship; and support educational and employment opportunities for under-served populations, especially women and local minorities.

Of course, corporate citizenship is not uniquely American. Companies throughout the world have pioneered progressive practices and used their resources to help people, not just sell to them. We must build coalitions and create common frameworks for policies and programs that serve the public good.

My commitment to corporate social responsibility and community involvement stems from a family tradition and a national call to service that took me to a remote African village. Many ideals of Peace Corps service apply equally to the success of a global enterprise. A profits-through-principles approach to business is good for business and good for society. ■

## Empowering Communities

By Charles Cobb, Jr.

*Charles Cobb, Jr., a former Mississippi field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, is senior writer and diplomatic correspondent for allAfrica.com.*

Has there ever been a time when community service was not valued or, indeed, held high as a standard of citizenship in this country? Roosevelt’s “New Deal” still stands as a model of government linking to community service. The power of John F.

Kennedy’s 1961 inaugural call—“Ask not what your country can do for you”—rested on a consensus of obligation to community service.

But whose community? What do we mean by “community” anyway? Although the 1960s opened with Kennedy’s almost romantic call to service, those who responded within the framework of civil rights struggle were often resisted—and not just by redneck racists, but at the highest levels of government.

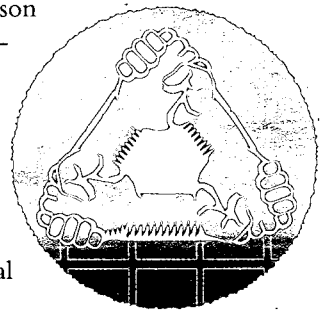
In the early 1960s, government—and I would argue the nation in general—was uncertain whether African Americans were part of the “community,” except as recipients of charity. The kind of blatant racial discrimination found in the South embarrassed and offended, yes. But the denial of citizenship to blacks wasn’t really on the national radar screen. It affected nothing that those in power recognized as important.

Embedded in civil rights, and in the easier-to-digest “community service,” is the idea of empowerment—an idea that is not readily embraced if it means empowering those perceived as being outside of our own “community.” The southern civil rights movement, of which I was a part, got the nation’s attention and affirmed black citizenship. The way the movement accomplished that end offers valuable lessons for anyone considering ideas of community service today.

First, the southern civil rights movement is best understood as a movement of community organizing rather than one of protest. Movement organizers committed to a specific idea of “service”—the “redemption and vindication of the race,” to use an old phrase—sought ways to encourage the black community to find its own voice. And though prominent advocates had long spoken up for civil rights, what finally effected change was people—sharecroppers, day workers, maids, cooks, and nursemaids—finding their own voices. Across the long-silent black belt, people who were usually spoken for began speaking for themselves in tones loud enough to be heard. They said, meeting much resistance—some of it violent—“This is what we want!”

The movement is a powerful illustration of how much commitment can compensate for a lack of material resources. Typically, an organizer entered a town or county and, working with a handful of local people, built local organizations—freedom schools, political groups like the Lowndes County Freedom Organization in Alabama, rural labor unions or small enterprises like Mississippi’s Poor People’s Corporation. The point to understand is that community organizers don’t lead. Instead, they cultivate leadership—grassroots leadership.

One tool that turned out to be critical was the meeting, which shifted, as the movement unfolded, from being a gathering where a person or panel of people presided, delivering information and strategy to others who listened and accepted, to a gathering where people actively engaged problems in various arenas ranging from local violence and denial of civil rights all the way up to politics and law at the national level.



Such grassroots empowerment was a radical idea. Even long-established civil rights figures and their long-time liberal allies were uncomfortable with the Fannie Lou Hamers speaking with their plantation voices. At one point during the challenge by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party at the Democratic party's national convention in 1964, Senator Hubert Humphrey bluntly rejected a core idea of the civil rights movement—meaningful participation in the decision-making affecting their lives—and said of Mrs. Hamer: “The president will not allow that illiterate woman to speak from the floor of the convention.”

Nonetheless, civil rights organizing produced a politically literate network of people who challenged and changed the status quo. They were not formally credentialed people. For the most part they, like Mrs. Hamer, did not even have high school diplomas. They were not members of labor unions or national church associations. They weren't big shots in civil rights organizations. When I think of these ordinary people and the extraordinary struggle they waged, I think of Ella Baker, whose hands shaped a half-century of civil rights organizing. To effect change, Ms. Baker told us once, you have to face a system “that does not lend itself to your needs and devise the means by which you begin to change that system.”

Does the Bush administration have this in mind when it posits the value of a new initiative for community service? Do the powerful of America? ■

## On Receiving the Elliot Richardson Prize for Public Service

By Alice M. Rivlin

*Alice M. Rivlin is a senior fellow in the Brookings Economic Studies program. She has served as founding director of the Congressional Budget Office, director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, and vice chair, Board of Governors, Federal Reserve System. This article is drawn from her remarks on receiving the Elliot Richardson prize on May 28, 2002.*

One of America's great national pastimes is baseball. Another is government bashing. It's such fun to encounter a troublesome government regulation or a public official who doesn't see things your way. You can roll your eyes and say, “Isn't that just like the government?”—and then tell your story at the office or the next dinner party to appreciative audiences guaranteed to nod and smile.

If you have a similar experience, and we all do, with a private company—its product doesn't work or the bill is wrong—it's no fun at all. You can't say, “Isn't that just like the private sec-

tor?” and get any nods or smiles. You just have to solve the problem.

Of course, government bashing is mostly recreational. In 1995, when I was director of the Office of Management and Budget, Congress voted to close the federal government rather than compromise with President Clinton over budget priorities. The congressional leadership, coming off an unusually government-bashing campaign, expected its decision to be wildly popular. But citizens were outraged that they couldn't picnic at their national park, get their passport renewed, have their FHA housing loan approved, or get their student loan application processed.

Congress was reminded then that government did useful things that citizens need and take for granted. We were all reminded again on September 11, when police officers and firefighters and soldiers and airmen that we take for granted most of the time suddenly became the people we are all depending on to save our lives and our way of life.

One recreational benefit of government bashing is that it saves us from facing up to how hard it is to make public policy in a free market economy. Over the past half-century, it has become apparent to the whole world that market economies work much better and produce a far higher standard of living for everyone than centrally planned ones. What's not recognized is that the easy part of a free market economy is the market part. The hard part is making the public policy within which the market can operate effectively.

We rarely think about how demanding a task we have given our policymakers. Indeed, Americans are in almost continuous high dudgeon over the failure of policymakers and politicians. We shake our heads and mutter that if only we had better people or stronger political leadership, everything would be okay. Or we blame democracy, at best a messy way to make decisions, without realizing that most of the problem is not the democratic process. It's that making public policy for a market economy is genuinely and continuously hard.

What's so hard? Well, first, if markets are to work, there have to be rules about property and bankruptcy and contracts and accounting standards and not injuring others in specified ways, and the rules have to be enforced. Second, there have to be social, environmental, and other public policies to handle the fact that people and companies operating in their own interest tend to load costs on to others when they can and leave behind those unable to fend for themselves. And, third, there are genuine public goods—armies and navies, police, roads, parks, public health services—that won't be provided by private investors on their own.

Dealing with these questions is the intellectually and morally challenging aspect of a free market system. In centrally planned economies, authorities make policy by fiat, telling somebody to do something or not to do something. But in free market systems, making most kinds of public policy requires adjusting incentives





and regulations just enough to accomplish a public purpose and to move activities in one direction or another without impeding the main action of the private-sector players and the productivity of their operations. The process is complex and contentious, and the participants can never get it right; they have to keep tinkering as conditions change.

Interestingly, although Americans fail to recognize how challenging public service jobs can be, they firmly believe that these jobs are onerous and unappreciated. They are sure that we who do them would much rather be doing something else.

Not on your life. Most people I know who have had careers in public service have loved their work. It used talents and ingenuity we didn't know we had and we didn't get to use elsewhere. It gave us the satisfaction of making the world or some little piece of it a little better.

In truth, we love our work the way baseball players love playing baseball. Baseball players don't want that known. For if people knew they played for fun, they wouldn't get all that money. And we don't want it known or we wouldn't get awards. ■

## A New Citizenship for a New Century

By Alan Khazei

*Alan Khazei is CEO of City Year, Inc.*

Historians will likely say that the 21st century began on September 11, 2001. We have reached a turning point in the history not only of our country, but also of democracy and of our increasingly global community. It is time to make real a new and deeper citizenship for this new century, as the actions we take now will shape our nation and our world for decades to come.

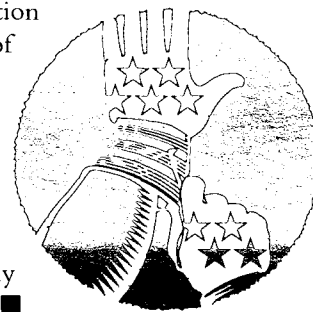
At a time of such momentous change, we look back nostalgically 60 years and rightly revere the "Greatest Generation" for fighting a depression and a world war for freedom and democracy. Today, as we fight a war against terrorists, we must also fight against the terrible injustice we see all around us. Every night in America, 750,000 people sleep on the streets. Every day, 11.6 million children—20 percent of our kids—wake up in poverty. Worldwide, 40 million people are living with AIDS, and a quarter of the world's population lives on no more than \$1.08 a day.

Since September 11, another great generation has been growing in America. Our nation's civic spirit has been renewed, and we must tap that spirit by creating a comprehensive system through which Americans can serve their communities, country, and world. President Bush has challenged all Americans to dedicate at least two years of their lives to service. That goal should become our north star, and we must not rest until we reach it.

To do that, we must dramatically expand the opportunities for Americans to serve full time, and we must leverage those full-time servers to inspire millions of Americans to serve part-time. Our nation's greatest untapped resource is its 25 million young people between the ages of 18 and 25. We should enable one million of them to enter full-time civilian service each year by 2020. To do so, we must expand America's current national service system, engaging all sectors of society. The president took several crucial first steps by creating the USA Freedom Corps, by proposing to increase AmeriCorps by 50 percent, and by doubling the Peace Corps. But more can be done.

- Universities and employers can publicly adopt a year of service as a key criterion in admissions and hiring.
- Universities can match AmeriCorps awards as part of their college financial aid programs.
- The president can host an annual White House summit on the state of national and community service in America and issue an annual State of Service report.
- All major American business companies can give each employee a week of paid time off to do community service.
- Congress can amend the Family and Medical Leave Act to allow all employees to take up to two weeks' unpaid leave each year to serve.
- Congress can set a goal of at least \$1 billion a year in federal challenge grants (to be matched one-to-one with nonfederal funding) to expand model national service programs.
- High schools can create "community service coach" positions and enable hundreds of thousands of students to do service learning.
- Communities can provide opportunities for tens of thousands of high school students to commit a "Summer of Service," spending summer break serving full time while earning educational awards for college.
- Several communities can bring leading model national service programs to scale to demonstrate the transformative power of a critical mass of service opportunities.
- AmeriCorps should permit some members to do some service abroad and allow programs to enroll people from other countries to serve here. The exchange would promote freedom and democracy worldwide.
- A new Global Service Corps can unite young people from many different countries to serve together all over the world.

By implementing these ideas and others, we can build a system of national service that will engage each and every generation in confronting the challenges of its time. Once all Americans commit themselves to service, the Greatest Generation will become the rule rather than the exception, and our grand experiment in democracy and citizen responsibility will truly inspire the globe. ■



# Religious Groups and Service

Challenging America's Faithful to Do More for the Community

**G**eorge Bush's pet idea probably owes its life to Bill Clinton's pet idea. By the spring of 2001, an unusual alliance of conservative Baptists and liberal civil libertarians had torpedoed President Bush's original faith-based initiative—especially the plan to give government grants to religiously oriented charities. His proposal to change the tax code to make it easier for people to give to charity had been hobbled by his early decision to spend most of his tax-cut chits on repealing the estate tax. But Bush still had one card up his sleeve: he made Clinton's AmeriCorps program (and community service) a key element of his faith-based initiative.

The link forged by Bush between AmeriCorps and the faith-based initiative is a welcome one for those interested in national service, for it broadens service's political base and its pool of leadership talent. But just as important, it's good for religion. On a practical level, there is a very compelling case for religious institutions to embrace national service. Even before Bush came along, about 15 percent of AmeriCorps members—some 6,000 strong—were working in faith-based groups counseling drug addicts, teaching reading to city kids, and handing out peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches to the homeless.

*Steven Waldman is the founder and editor-in-chief of Beliefnet.com, the leading multifaith religion website. He also was senior advisor to the CEO at the Corporation for National Service and author of The Bill, a book about the creation of AmeriCorps.*

Faith-based groups love full-time service workers. Leaders of religious charities routinely report that they have no shortage of unpaid, "occasional" volunteers; what they're missing is the people to help recruit, train, and manage these volunteers. John DiIulio, the first head of Bush's office of faith-based action, noted that the "missing link" is a group of full-time, energetic people who show up every day and supervise the volunteers. A typical AmeriCorps member recruits or manages 12 additional unpaid volunteers.

For years, Habitat for Humanity managers complained that they had to turn away volunteers because they didn't have enough reliable crew leaders. Along came AmeriCorps. At first, Habitat's founder, Millard Fuller, turned down AmeriCorps, fearing government entanglement. But he was—he reports now gladly—overruled by his board. Today Habitat is one of the largest AmeriCorps programs, and Fuller estimates that the AmeriCorps members have significantly increased their flock of volunteers. In all, the 600 Habitat AmeriCorps members have directly supervised 241,000 Habitat volunteers, who have built more than 2,000 houses that otherwise would never have been built.

National service helped the faith-based initiative by aiding small religious groups without adding huge bureaucratic burdens. In supporting service, the government is usually funding a person rather than a program; as a result it requires less intrusive monitoring by the religious group. Mostly the government wants to know what the AmeriCorps member is doing, rather than what the group as a whole is doing. It



By Steven Waldman



doesn't matter how much of Habitat's budget goes to administrative overhead or overseas missions or salaries. What matters is that the AmeriCorps member attached to the program is working hard and accomplishing something.

Consequently, national service solves some of the tricky church-state dilemmas of the faith-based initiative. Instead of worrying about whether consumers of the charity are getting a dose of illegal religion, the government can view its aid as akin to Pell Grants or student loans. It is perfectly constitutional for a 20-year-old to use a Pell Grant to go to Catholic seminary. The aid is going to the student, not the school (even though the school clearly benefits).

### Pressing Churches to Do More

The government's current approach both to service and to religious groups, however, cannot be described as Kennedy-esque. It emphasizes what your country can do for you (and your church), not what you (or your church) can do for your country.

Most of Clinton's senior staff never quite bought into the sacrifice-for-the-country part of the service initiative and forever pitched AmeriCorps primarily as a way of paying for college. When Clinton introduced his plan for AmeriCorps in New Orleans in April 1993, the banner behind him read, "National Service Means Equal Opportunity." The pitch often was altruistic bribery: do good work and you'll get helped in return.

Likewise, George Bush's faith-based rhetoric is all about helping religion and very little about challenging the faithful. Without implying that these cash-strapped, noble institutions are anything other than angelic, it must nevertheless be said that religious groups do need to be challenged.

Americans are more generous with their time and money than almost any other culture. They give \$190 billion to charity and volunteer 20 billion hours a year. Those statistics, however, are deeply misleading, in a way few people want to discuss. The \$190 billion figure is less a sign of America's generosity than its religiosity. Sixty percent of Americans' contributions go to religious institutions—more than go to youth development, human services, education, health, and foreign crises combined.

The money is essential for the functioning of religion in America. It's why pluralism flourishes here without the need for (and risks of) massive government funding. But while all this charitable activity is valuable, it should not be confused with help for the poor—or with solving social problems. Most religious charity and volunteerism is directed inward—toward the congregation, the building, the Sunday school, the organ—rather than outward toward the community as a whole. In 1997, a typical congregant of a Protestant church gave an average of \$497. But \$418 of that went to upkeep of the church and only \$79 to "benevolences," according to a survey by Empty Tomb, Inc., a Christian research firm.

How about volunteering? Here again, much of the service done with the church is done for the church. According to Lester Salamon, director of the Institute for Policy Studies at Johns Hopkins University, only 7–15 percent of volunteering done through churches helps the larger community.

There are religiously based service corps, such as the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, that operate independently of AmeriCorps. Yet all of these religious corps together field only a few thousand volunteers. Few religious faiths make full-time national service an important part of their mission, and few donors to these faiths focus their money on such an effort. If every house of worship in America sponsored one person a year to do full-time service, it would generate roughly 350,000 corps members.

Those religious groups that do emphasize missionary work—like the Mormons—are among the fastest-growing religions in the world. To be sure, that's partly because their missionary work involves proselytizing, but it's mostly because they're helping the needy. In other words, it's most likely that religions that increase their emphasis on community service will be improving their image and appealing to a new generation of young people—exactly the sort they struggle most to attract into their pews right now.

One of the few things on which all the world's religions agree is the need to do good works. A national service effort enlisting the nation's houses of worship would not only revitalize service, it could well revitalize religion. ■



# FLYING COLORS

By David Winston

## Americans Face the Test of September 11

**E**xactly what happened to America last fall? In focus groups I have conducted since September 11, I have been constantly amazed at the number of people who watched live on television as the second plane crashed into the World Trade Center. All were deeply shaken by the sight of hundreds of innocent men and women dying in an instant. When the two towers collapsed, the horror was magnified and forever etched in people's minds.

In the hours and days after the attack, however, Americans saw something else—something surprising that would give them strength, make them proud, and show the world what this country is made of. Average Americans, suddenly forced into horrific situations, simply did their jobs and, in doing so, became true heroes. They were there when the country needed them.

Comments from focus groups conducted for the Ripon Society capture this changed attitude toward America: "I think everybody banded together. Everybody was an American and we all just worked together." The revelation appears to have been startling. In the back of many people's minds, doubt had lingered as to whether this generation of Americans had what it takes to stand up to a tough challenge, the way the "Greatest Generation" did in World War II. One focus group participant put it this way: "I think it's made me more grateful to be an American. I have never been patriotic, but I felt it for the first time really. My father was a Holocaust survivor who lived through hard times. My grandfather was a World War II veteran. And I think this is really our first test, although we haven't really had to do anything personally. This is really the first thing that has happened to my generation, the first terrible thing that we've really had to confront."

Before September 11, Americans harbored many doubts about themselves. Television, newspapers, radios, and magazines depicted a vain and self-centered society where average Americans made little or no individual contribution, where the exchange of ideas had been reduced to television screaming matches, and where politics had become ideological food fights intended to score partisan points rather than solve people's problems.

*David Winston is president of The Winston Group.*

September 11 radically changed the political environment, at least for average Americans. Many surveys just before September 11 found Americans growing less certain about the direction of the country as the recession began to take its toll on the public's optimism. According to the August 29–30 New Models survey, 40 percent of the country thought we were headed in the right direction, while 44 percent thought we were headed off on the wrong track.

So logic dictated that after the attack in September, people's attitudes toward the direction of the country would likely become worse. Reporters, politicians, and pundits all predicted a terrible economic shock, and when the stock market reopened a week after the attacks, their forecast seemed on the money as stock values plunged. But the "direction of the country" numbers didn't follow Wall Street's negative path. Instead, optimism surged. An October 25–28 CBS/*NY Times* survey showed that people felt the country was headed in the right direction by a two-to-one margin. A sense of pride in who we are as a country and as individuals overcame negative economic news in an unprecedented way. People saw that the heroism of New York's firefighters, police, and emergency personnel was more important than stock prices. The freedom that for many had been an abstract lesson in a civics class suddenly took on real meaning. Americans found themselves measuring their lives and their country not in economic terms but in values like family, friends, and community with a newfound respect for each other. This new sense of community and bonding together as a people has created a unique opportunity for increased civic activity and involvement.

Following the horrific scenes of terror, people began talking with each other, asking questions most had rarely, if ever, asked themselves. Who are we as a country? Do we have good values? What does it mean to be an American? What does freedom mean? What is our responsibility as a nation and as individuals? What is really important to me personally? Are there good and evil in this world? That conversation resulted in four significant shifts in public opinion.

First and foremost, as people found a renewed faith and pride in their fellow Americans, patriotism surged. The spirit that swept America was not just a typical "rally round the flag" reaction to threats against the nation and its people. It sprang, in large part, from the country's sudden realization that we



liked who we were as a people—a feeling that has generated a new sense of community.

Second, people turned away from cynicism and moral relativism. They began to believe once again in the concepts of right and wrong, of good and evil. For decades, the media, politicians, academicians, and other leaders shied away from moral judgments. Actions, good or bad, were often presented in ambiguous terms, rarely in black or white but in shades of more “comfortable” gray. September 11 changed that. Moral clarity replaced moral relativism for millions of Americans.

The third major shift was a new focus on key values. Before September 11, most Americans’ political attitudes were usually determined by their views on specific issues, whether prescription drugs or education or foreign affairs. After Septem-

ber 11, issues were seen through a new value-driven prism as Americans reassessed their values and their priorities. As a Ripon post-September 11 study found, the American public underwent a fundamental change. They no longer judged the state of the union solely in economic terms as they had for decades but moved to a more value-driven estimation, which, in turn, changed the traditional right track/wrong track measurement from an issue question to a value-driven question.

Finally, the American public rejected partisanship. This trend away from ideological or partisan problem solving was under way before September 11. After September 11, however, the country saw the two parties and the two ideologies come together and get things done. Now Americans know the two parties can work together, and they expect it.

Most Americans understand that the nation faces “a clear and present danger” here at home and overseas. Yet, as the right track/wrong track data showed right after the terrorist attack, the challenges of September 11 reinvigorated the optimistic spirit of America in a way we hadn’t seen in more than half a century.

Today, after weeks of corporate scandals and a battering in the stock market that has devoured the retirement and college savings of millions of Ameri-

cans, the right track/wrong track results have finally moved into the negative column. But it took a near-historic downturn and an assault on two key values—retirement security and the ability to fund their children’s college education—to do it. And as recent Winston Group surveys have shown, unlike negative right track/wrong track environments in the past, people aren’t blaming either party for the market’s economic woes, and a majority is generally optimistic about the long-term future of America.

This newfound resiliency, even in the face of serious economic troubles and continued terror threats, confirms that the American people’s reassessment of values and newfound sense of community since September 11 are neither shallow nor temporary. Is this a great country or what? ■

# A Generation to Be PROUD OF

## Young Americans Volunteer to Make a Difference

By Peter D. Hart and Mario A. Brossard

**Y**oung people today are getting a bad rap. If you ask the typical 40- or 50-year-old what he or she thinks of today's young Americans, you'll hear descriptions ranging from amoral and cynical to self-indulgent and money-grubbing. But several surveys focusing exclusively on young people have been released this year, and all paint a portrait of a generation that is both striking and encouraging. The surveys find that young Americans are in fact among the most optimistic, least cynical adults; they are actively engaged in helping to make their communities better places; and they are tolerant and civically engaged.

In April we conducted a major survey among 814 Americans aged 18 to 30 for Public Allies, a national service organization based in Milwaukee, to commemorate its 10th anniversary. The organization, an AmeriCorps program, identifies talented young adults from diverse backgrounds and advances their leadership through full-time paid apprenticeships in nonprofit organizations, weekly leadership training, and team service projects. Another poll on this topic, released in March, was conducted last January for the Center for Information and Research in Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) among 1,500 young people aged 15 to 25.

Instead of finding young Americans downcast about the implications of the nation's recently declared war on terrorism and their seemingly diminished employment prospects in the poorly performing economy, these surveys suggest that young Americans remain positive and quite optimistic about the future. By a two-to-one margin, youth aged 18 to 30 say they think this is a good time in America's history for people their age, with lots of opportunities to get ahead and achieve their goals.

This may come as a surprise because over the past couple of generations, American pollsters have recorded diminished levels of optimism and found that the trust many Americans place in their most important institutions has waned. Looking closely at results from recent NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* national surveys, however, we see that young people display more trust in certain American institutions—Congress, the FBI, the CIA, and the national news media—than other adults (table 1).

More important than how they look at institutions is how

invested they are in making a difference. While their parents were activists in social protest and worked to make society more open and accepting, this generation's call to action is social issues and human rights. They are especially impressive because, unlike their parents, they are not protesters and marchers, but participators and doers. They want to be involved one-to-one, and they want to make a difference. Their volunteerism is up close and personal.

Just as important, this generation displays a strong sense of self-confidence, believing they personally can make a difference. Almost half of young Americans aged 15 to 25 say they believe they personally have the power to make at least "some" difference in solving the problems they see in their communities. And the problems they are most interested in fixing tend to be those that allow them to have a direct impact on improving the everyday lives of the less fortunate in their local communities. Eighty-five percent of those aged 18 to 30 across the nation say that volunteering to help individuals in a direct way is a "very" (58 percent) or "fairly" (27 percent) effective way for them personally to bring about needed changes in our country. Half (49 percent) of respondents in the CIRCLE survey say volunteering in local community activities to address local problems is the most important kind of activity in which a citizen can engage, and 23 percent say the same about participating in national organizations trying to change our society.

More important, they translate their words into deeds. The Public Allies survey finds two-thirds saying they have helped their communities within the past three years through activities like volunteering their time, belonging to an organization, or advocating on a public issue.

This generation is not volunteering to pad resumes or look good on college applications. Almost half of those aged 15 to 25 say they volunteer because it makes a difference (21 percent) or makes them feel good (24 percent), while more than a third of those aged 18 to 30 indicate their impetus is a personal experience or issue they care about (22 percent) or that their spiritual or religious faith is the single greatest influence on their desire to improve their communities (14 percent).

Although their preferred mode of service is one-to-one, their service has broad residual effects. Almost three-quarters (74 percent) of Public Allies respondents say their service increased their interest in following news about a public issue or area of the community in which they had not previously

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been interested. Just as large a share of young adults—72 percent—say their service has enhanced their understanding of public issues, politics, government, or civics.

Significantly, a majority (55 percent) of all young adults say their activities have increased their tolerance or changed their views on people of different racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. A majority also indicate that their volunteering has changed their view on a public issue. Service, these results suggest, not only helps transform those being served, but also helps turn those doing the serving into engaged, enlightened, and tolerant members of our civic society.

The types of service opportunities and organizations in which young adults express most interest explain some of these personal changes. Beyond tutoring and mentoring youth (75 percent), Public Allies finds young adults displaying a “great deal” or “fair amount” of interest in volunteering to help build affordable housing for low-income families (65 percent), helping community residents gain access to health care and other social services (60 percent), educating people about environmental conservation (53 percent), and assisting with homeland security by helping communities prepare for threats of terrorism (53 percent).

These independent surveys show that young people are not simply paying lip service to civic engagement—they take their role in our larger national community quite seriously.

The cry of the 1960s youth was “Never trust anyone over age 30.” Ironically, the challenge to that now-aging generation is to begin to trust and believe in this new under-30 generation. Although less than 10 percent of under-30 Americans now know even a “fair amount” about the Bush administration’s Freedom Corps, they are eager to participate in their communities on the most important issues of the day. It is time to salute them and provide them more avenues for participation. ■

Table 1. Trust in American Institutions:  
A Generation Gap

| PERCENT                                                    | AMERICANS<br>UNDER 30 | AMERICANS<br>30 AND OVER |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Confidence in Congress</b>                              |                       |                          |
| A great deal/Quite a bit                                   | 47                    | 35                       |
| Very little/None at all                                    | 7                     | 19                       |
| <b>Confidence in the national news media</b>               |                       |                          |
| A great deal/Quite a bit                                   | 38                    | 28                       |
| Very little/None at all                                    | 25                    | 30                       |
| <b>Feelings toward the Federal Bureau of Investigation</b> |                       |                          |
| Very/Somewhat positive                                     | 49                    | 38                       |
| Very/Somewhat negative                                     | 25                    | 35                       |
| <b>Feelings toward the Central Intelligence Agency</b>     |                       |                          |
| Very/Somewhat positive                                     | 37                    | 30                       |
| Very/Somewhat negative                                     | 27                    | 38                       |

Source: NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* polls. Questions about Congress and the news media are from a January 2002 poll; those about the FBI and CIA, from a June 2002 poll.



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Courtesy Rock The Vote

# SERVICE AND THE STATE

## Politicizing the Need for Social Connection

By Tod Lindberg

In April 1998, Al Gore suffered an embarrassment. As usual, he released his income tax return for the previous year. Total taxable income on the joint return for 1997 was \$197,729, most of which came from his vice presidential salary of \$171,500. The Gores paid a total of \$47,662 in federal taxes. But Schedule A, for itemized deductions, listed charitable contributions for the year at a grand total of \$353.

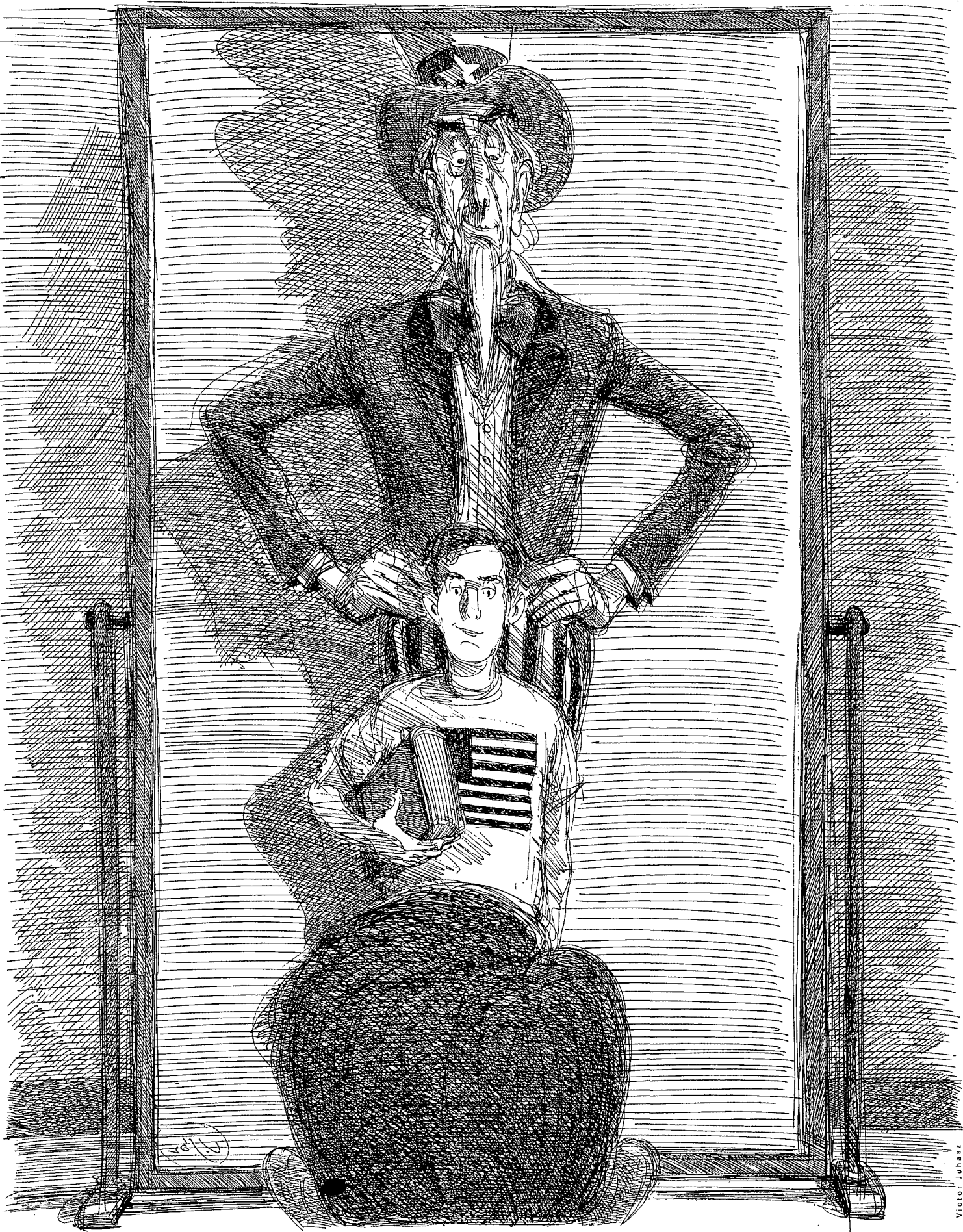
Critics pounced: Gore was a charity cheapskate. The Republican National Committee issued a press release. Conservative columnists snickered. Nor was the furor confined to conservative media. As Stacy Palmer of the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* was quoted in *USA Today*, “Certainly a lot of other Americans in that income bracket have found ways to dig deeper in their pockets.” The *New York Times* noted that the Gores’ charitable contributions for 1997 amounted to “less than two-tenths of 1 percent of their income.” Ouch.

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Now, surely, anyone who had thought politically about the release of Gore’s tax return would have told the vice president that charitable giving in such a small amount would provoke a response. Not giving more would be imprudent, at best. But let us set aside political considerations for a moment. Let us ask, instead, a moral question: shouldn’t Al Gore—or, for that matter, anyone with taxable income of \$197,729 for the year—give more than \$353 to charity?

Before you reach the “obvious” conclusion, may I offer a little context? Household income is not the same as great wealth. Gore’s May 1998 financial disclosure form listed assets between \$770,000 and \$870,000, all highly illiquid: a house and farm in Carthage, Tennessee; a house in Arlington, Virginia;





Victor Juhász



and leasing rights to zinc mined on the Carthage property. Uncharacteristically for a person with Gore's income, the vice president reported no investments in stocks or mutual funds. The strong bull market of the 1990s roared all around the vice president without really touching him.

Now, about that sizable income. True, the Gores were well-off compared with almost all other Americans. But the vice president also had some considerable expenses in 1997. He incurred some \$100,000 in legal bills in connection with the Justice Department investigation into Democratic campaign finance irregularities in 1996. (The attorney general concluded there was no basis for further investigation of Gore.) To pay part of them, he borrowed money from a Carthage bank. Also, three of the Gore children were attending expensive schools: Kristin, his second daughter, was at Harvard; Sarah, his third, was at the National Cathedral School; son Albert III was at Sidwell Friends. I do not know whether the Gores received financial aid. But the tuition and fees for attending those three schools for the year would have been in the neighborhood of \$70,000. In addition, in July 1997, Gore's oldest daughter, Karenna, married Andrew Schiff in a ceremony followed by a reception for 300 guests at the vice president's residence. The cost of such an event could approximate one of the private school tuitions. In short, if I take an after-tax income of \$150,000 and start subtracting, I can arrive at a negative number for the year in a hurry.

It's also worth noting that 1997 was an aberration. The previous year, the Gores donated to charity some \$35,000 in royalties from a book by Tipper. And I think one would be hard-pressed to state that either Al or Tipper Gore was somehow derelict in their contribution to public life, broadly construed. For example, in 1997 Tipper won the Hubert H. Humphrey Civil Rights Award for "selfless and devoted service to the cause of equality" as a result of her advocacy for the homeless and the mentally ill.

So thank you very much, but I will not be reaching the conclusion that the

Gores should have given more to charity in 1997 than they did (except on the grounds of political prudence). What the Gore case shows, and the reason I have belabored it, is that the real-world circumstances of individuals or families do not always fit neatly with generalizations, even valid ones, about what people "should" do.

### Is It Bad Not to Serve?

The question of national service invites the same scrutiny. Is service good? The answer must be yes. As President Bush noted in a speech at Ohio State University in June, "Service is important to your neighbors; service is important to your character; and service is important to your country."

As for neighbors, he observed, rightly, that "in the shadow of our nation's prosperity, too many children grow up without love and guidance, too many women are abandoned and abused, too many men are addicted and illiterate, and too many elderly Americans live in loneliness. These Americans are not strangers, they are fellow citizens; not problems, but priorities. They are as much a part of the American community as you and I, and they deserve better from this country." As for each individual doing service, "everyone needs some cause larger than his or her own profit." As for country, "we serve others because we're Americans, and we want to do something for the country we love."

Who would disagree? Certainly not former President Clinton, who noted in a *USA Today* op-ed around the same time, "We must take full advantage of the current convergence of political support for national service and the deep desire of so many Americans to serve."

But now that we have established our moral generalization—service is good—it seems to me we are obliged to invert it and particularize it: is the failure to serve always bad? I don't see how, looking at the circumstances of Al Gore in the closely related case of charitable contributions—donating one's labor as against the product of one's labor, money—one can answer simply and

always yes. Should Gore have pulled one of his children out of private school for the year to have \$20,000 to tithe? Should he have stiffed his lawyers or skimped on legal representation? Should he have encouraged Karenna and her beau to elope?

Well, surely he should have done something—for the sake of his political career? Yes, he should have. We put that question aside earlier, but in fact, it is of the essence. We know about the Gores' charitable giving in 1997 solely and precisely because he was a holder of high public office. How much you or I give to charity is nobody's business but our

**The circumstances of different lives, or of a single life over the course of time, call forth different solutions to the problem of social connection.**

own. How much the Gores give turns out to be everybody's business. He is held publicly accountable for his contributions. The connection between Gore's giving and an underlying charitable intention has been broken. If we are going to be graded on our giving, and the grades posted, and our future depends to some degree on whether people think we pass, we are going to give first and foremost to pass. Another way of putting this is that Gore's charitable giving has been politicized.

Do we run the risk of a similar politicization in the case of a government role in promoting service? I think the answer must be yes. It is already evident in the nation's largest voluntary national service program, the U.S. military.

There are many good reasons to join the Marines—and also many reasons not to. Those who make the latter decision have a price to pay (admittedly, typically small): a deficiency in comparison with those who have worn the uniform and therefore presumably have been willing to risk their lives in service to their

country. It is not quite “bad” not to have served in uniform. But neither is it quite as “good” as having done so. I occasionally receive e-mail in response to my writing on foreign affairs from correspondents demanding to know whether I ever served in the military and telling me to shut up if I didn’t. I reply that foreign affairs analysis deserves to be considered on the merits, not dismissed with ad hominem attacks. But this response isn’t entirely adequate; something is missing, a uniform.

But, really, is one a better writer on foreign affairs for having served in the military? Not necessarily. Military service might be desirable, but everything has an opportunity cost. The two years spent in the army are two years spent not doing something else, and it is not obvious that the “something else” is valueless in shaping the person who will go on to write about foreign affairs. And if one joins the army in order to credential oneself for a career, there is nothing of an impulse to serve motivating the decision. Again, one does so to forestall future public opprobrium: the decision is politicized.

A more extreme case would be that of President Clinton. As a young man during the Vietnam War, he wrote a letter to the head of his local draft board explaining that his sympathies did not lie with the U.S. military but that he wanted to maintain his “political viability within the system” and so wasn’t willing to consider actions too drastic in avoiding service. Decades later, as commander-in-chief, he suffered for his nonservice. His political opponents made hay of his lack of military experience and what they took to be the contemptuous tone of his letter. Worse, a palpable anti-Clinton sentiment took hold within the military itself. Many thought him unworthy to be their commander. Would Clinton have been a better commander-in-chief had he served? The case is surprisingly hard to make convincingly. Serving in the military does not cause some certain, distinct effect on the person who has served—an effect measurably missing in those who have not served. It seems more accurate to say that the character

of the person has a constitutive effect on the meaning of the military service. People’s responses to the experience of combat, for example, can range from superhawkish to hyperdovish.

The Clinton nonservice took place in the context of a draft during wartime; mine, in the context of the all-volunteer force during peacetime. But note that the voluntariness is not dispositive. One cannot say that the compulsory system politicizes but that the voluntary system manages not to. Both politicize, in that they set a state standard for good service that implicitly invites the judgment that those who do not serve are wanting.

### **Serving Because We Have To?**

We can’t do without a military. We have to live with the problem of the distinction between those who served in it and those who did not. But we do not need a civilian service program administered by the state. We do not need to create a world in which the state says “service is good”—thereby implying that a failure to perform it, according to the fashion prescribed by the state, is bad.

Of course service is good. Americans obviously think so. Everett Carl Ladd in *The Ladd Report* demonstrated that the United States has “an unusually expansive and demanding sense of citizenship” whereby “the citizen has responsibilities for the health and well-being of his society that extend far beyond his relationship with the state.” Hence, Americans volunteer in large numbers and give substantial sums to charitable causes—have always done so. Not because their tax returns will be scrutinized to make sure their contributions measure up, but because they want to. The individualism of the American polity has always been grounded in a dense social fabric. We are not monads. We need connections with others to be fully ourselves.

Nor do I know to whom President Bush was referring when he spoke of someone with no “cause larger than his or her own profit.” I suppose the unreconstructed Silas Marner would do. But the point of that story would seem to be that Marner starts out lacking something that no amount of gold will satisfy.

Even tech stock analysts and lawyers get married, have kids, coach soccer, and contribute to the United Way.

The circumstances of different lives, or of a single life over the course of time, call forth different solutions to the problem of social connection, which is the impulse underlying service and charitable giving. There is no political solution to this problem, only the possibility of its politicization by the state, transforming something that we do to fulfill our heartfelt desires into something we do to avoid the sanction that follows from not doing so. To the extent we are acting only to avoid sanction, we won’t satisfy that longing anyway.

In the name of promoting social connection—“these Americans are not strangers, they are fellow citizens”—proponents of national service propose, in effect, to colonize a part of the social field, the impulse to serve and give, that is constituted precisely by the felt need for social connection. I doubt that the state is up to the task. It is possible the result will be benign. It is also possible that young people (and others) will begin to approach service through the state as some children approach the vegetables on their plate: they eat them because they think they have to.

I am not inclined to think that national service will spoil anyone’s impulse to serve and give by making a failure to serve and give in conformity with the outline of national service a matter of implicit social sanction. I think the human need for social connection is far, far stronger than that. And for many, no doubt, national service will be fulfilling. But as more and more high school guidance counselors ask their charges whether they have considered a stint in the program—service being, after all, a good thing—the more they will also convey the message that not serving is a bad thing. You may, under those circumstances, get a workforce of some utility, but you will be adding little to the fulfillment of the human need for social connection. The notion that service administered through the state will strengthen the ties that bind us into a society, or create new ties, strikes me therefore as mistaken. ■

# Then and Now

## Civic Innovation and Public Policy for Democracy

I began my own civic career in the early 1960s at a Catholic high school in New York City. Each week our Legion of Mary group, under the guidance of Brother Gabriel, met to discuss service and faith, and every Sunday for several years I went to Welfare Island (since renamed Roosevelt Island) to take impoverished people in long-term care at Goldwater Memorial Hospital to mass. I visited with them, asked how they had been feeling, and shared stories of their lives. They wanted to know how we were doing in school and in our extracurricular activities.

My regular buddy on those Sundays was Mr. Clarence Chambers, who was confined to a rickety old wooden wheelchair and rarely had family visitors. Every Sunday when I walked through the swinging doors of the bleak long hallway, Mr. Chambers welcomed me as a son. He always wanted to know how my track meets had gone, and he was especially pleased when, in the spring of my sophomore year, I brought him my gold medal from the Penn Relays and asked him to keep it for me. Every now and then I have a twinge of regret about not having that medal to show my own son. But it was a small sacrifice for a volunteer to make. And Mr. Chambers gave me much more than I could ever have given him.

### Hampton, Virginia, 2002: Youth Civic Engagement

Today, some four decades later, I sit in my home office wearing a T-shirt, emblazoned “Volunteer Superstar,” that was given to me earlier this year by Alicia Tundidor, a 10th-grade African-American “youth commissioner” from Hampton, Virginia. She made the gift during a city council meeting that was packed to overflowing with young people to proclaim Youth Service Day and recognize the city’s efforts to build what she described as “a youth civic engagement system.”

For the past 10 years, Hampton, a city of 146,000 with a modest economic base and a population roughly split between black and white, has been building this system. Many of the

young people undoubtedly have motives much like mine when I was a volunteer at their age. But what is going on in Hampton is considerably more sophisticated than anything I knew as a young person, even considering the student government and mock political conventions in which I was also involved. Civic engagement of young people has become a core value of the local political scene in Hampton, including its administrative, educational, and service systems.

Terry O’Neill, Hampton’s director of planning, sees the engagement of young people as an essential component in reinventing government. He has two paid high school “youth planners” on staff for 15 hours a week each and says he could use “four times that number if we had the resources.” He and his staff provide mentoring and technical assistance to the youth planners, who work with young people citywide to develop youth-friendly space and transportation for the city’s comprehensive plan. Laurine Press, director of parks and recreation, engages youth, asking them to envision the kinds of recreation they will want not just now but when they have young families of their own. Shellae Blackwell draws young people into the work of the Neighborhood Commission to work with adults on community improvement. Dr. Allen Davis and Johnny Pauls, superintendent of schools and director of secondary education, respectively, convene student representatives of the Superintendent’s Advisory Group to discuss issues like curricular requirements and state standards. Students in principals’ advisory groups meet regularly in each of the city’s four public high schools. Hampton has “youth community policing” in schools and neighborhoods. And every month Hampton’s 22 youth commissioners convene in open session in the city council chambers, sitting in the raised seats of the city councilors.

### System Change, Culture Change

Assistant city manager Mike Monteith recalls that Hampton set out not just to have more youth “programs” but to “create a learning community” among a broad range of professionals and stakeholder groups. The goal was to build a system that progressively expanded leadership opportunities for sustained impact and began to treat youth “as assets, not deficits.”

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Once Hampton decided to invest in youth development, it established a city office, the Coalition for Youth, to be a catalyst for change. A multi-year federal “community partnership” grant from the Department of Health and Human Services provided early critical support to enable the city to do the planning that brought so many stakeholders on board.



Early on, Hampton’s leading nonprofit youth services agency, Alternatives, Inc., had to reinvent itself from a substance abuse agency to one that developed youth leadership. Hampton’s young people objected to its deficits approach. They did not want to be “fixed” by professionals or even “prevented” from needing to be fixed. They wanted opportunities to contribute in real and visible ways to the community, and they wanted the respect that comes with doing public work of genuine value.

Over the years, the key adult catalysts of change at both the Coalition for Youth and Alternatives, Inc., especially Cindy Carlson and Richard Goll, have approached their work as long-term organizing, mentoring, and relationship building. They have identified adult and youth leaders and worked to build lasting collaboration around a vision of engaged youth.

Volunteer Superstars? Yes! But the real story in Hampton is one of organizing for civic democracy, of a formal role for youth in governance, of transforming organizational and professional norms to support the work of citizens. It is a story of public policy that can support sustained civic innovation.

Hampton’s youth civic engagement movement has channeled individual volunteerism—volunteerism that would oth-

erwise be big-hearted, yet episodic and divorced from power—into sustained institutional work. Unlike my own volunteer experience, it has changed the way that citizens in all their roles—volunteers, social service and education professionals, public officials, stakeholder groups—do the work of the public. This is not volunteerism but civic democracy woven throughout core institutional systems and designed to tackle the complex problems of the 21st century.



### Civic Innovation

Over the past eight years, Lewis Friedland and I, with our research teams at Brandeis University and the University of Wisconsin, have interviewed more than 700

civic innovators like those in Hampton—youth and adults, community activists and heads of major networks, local officials and federal agency staff.

Some have reinvented congregation-based community organizing in national networks like the Industrial Areas Foundation so that low-income communities can share in power and help build sustainable partnerships for job training, housing development, and school reform.

Others have reinvigorated urban democracy in cities like Portland, Oregon, where neighborhood and civic associations have become more inclusive and more capable of sustained problem solving, and where their work is complemented by community policing, neighborhood district attorneys, environmental and community planning, watershed associations, greenspace partnerships, and a Portland State University-wide curriculum devoted to generating community leadership.

“Civic environmentalists” have developed watershed, forest, and estuary restoration strategies as partnerships among

community and environmental groups, farmers and ranchers, and government officials. “Healthy community” innovators have engaged community organizations, congregations, parish nurses associations, hospitals, public health agencies, and some managed care systems to develop community-based health improvement strategies. More and more universities have begun to rethink their mission and practices in terms of civic engagement. As Robert Bruininks, provost and vice president for academic affairs at the University of Minnesota, put it, these universities are making big changes in how undergraduates learn, how faculty are rewarded, how they partner with communities—even how researchers map the human genome and then become responsible for leading discussion of the ethical and public policy implications of their work.

### **Public Policy for Democracy**

At all levels of the federal system, public policy can support such civic innovation. There are many models of policy design on which to build.

In environmental policy, for instance, the federal Chesapeake Bay Program has helped build the capacity of local partnerships among watershed associations, school-based water quality monitoring groups, fishing and boating clubs, farm and business groups. It has also helped local governments catalyze civic partnerships for ecosystem restoration. The Environmental Education Act of 1990 and Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Environmental Education have not only supported service learning in schools and communities, but also helped build capacity among national and state environmental education associations to support community action. The Office of Environmental Justice and the Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics have each helped support innovative civic strategies. The Estuary Restoration Act of 2000, designed in part by a national coalition of 11 restoration groups, has spurred further community-based restoration partnerships. States like Massachusetts, California, and Washington have made collaborative watershed restoration a centerpiece of environmental protection. And more and more local governments are working in “sustainable communities” partnerships.

One could catalogue and analyze a whole range of program and policy designs that build youth civic capacity for public problem solving. The Office of University Partnerships at the Department of Housing and Urban Development has helped support universities working with local groups on a wide array of community development issues. HUD’s YouthBuild supports leadership development as part of its job training and education programs for young adults from inner-city neighborhoods. The Corporation for National and Community Service supports service learning, local capacity building, and volunteering in numerous local and national projects. The Department of Agriculture supported the 4-H National Conversation on Youth Development for the 21st Century that engaged some 50,000 people this past year in helping reorient the 4-H movement around a vision of “empowering youth as equal partners.” The Justice Department’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has supported innovative teen courts where

youth assume responsible roles in adjudication. Massachusetts offers peer leadership programs for young people in health promotion. San Francisco now includes a youth commission as part of its charter. New York City has Beacon centers in every school district offering community service, problem solving, and leadership development opportunities.

### **Needed: Strong Political Leadership at the Top**

Over the past decade we have reached the point where we, as a nation, can set the goal of reinventing government to catalyze robust civic problem solving across the land. Doing so will take political leadership at the highest levels.

The Clinton administration, despite its support for many of these programs and its 1995 State of the Union theme of “reinventing citizenship,” was unable to focus its efforts or capture the public imagination. A proposal for a White House office that would systematically catalyze civic initiatives across federal agencies was dropped in 1994. The Gore campaign of 2000 ignored these themes almost entirely, leaving the field of community and citizenship to Ralph Nader’s anticorporate populism on the left and George W. Bush’s compassionate conservatism on the right.

In the wake of September 11, President Bush has raised the ideal of active citizenship to a new level of public discourse. Yet his approach has major shortcomings. First, the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, designed narrowly from the start, has never had the capacity to support community-based and civic problem-solving strategies across the full range of federal agencies and programmatic areas. The work of the Corporation for National and Community Service is essential, but its scope is also limited. Second, the frame of volunteerism and service is simply not muscular enough to do the heavy lifting required for reinvigorating civic democracy and institutional change. And, third, public support for innovative civic strategies, which often require new ways of thinking about regulation and service delivery, will weaken if accompanied by one-sided corporate versions of deregulation or social service cutbacks.

### **Looking Ahead**

The service I did as a volunteer was formative in my teenage years, and it is a hopeful sign that service is on the rise among today’s youth. Yet volunteerism, service, and compassion, however laudable, too easily slide into individual good works, ignore core institutional practices, sidestep questions of power, and often reinforce paternalism and dependency.

To reinvent democracy, we will need to go beyond volunteerism to build civic engagement. We can—and must—revitalize democratic problem solving to draw in poor, working class, and minority communities that have drifted away, or have been driven away, from civic and political participation in recent decades. They are not populations to be “served” by big-hearted volunteers. Nor are they simply constituencies to be mobilized for more “services.” They are communities to be fully engaged in problem solving and public work in partnership with the full spectrum of our government, business, and civic institutions. ■



# The Volunteering Decision

By Paul C. Light

AP/Wide World Photos

## What Prompts It? What Sustains It?

**G**eorge W. Bush is not the first president to ask Americans to give more of themselves to volunteering. Except for Gerald Ford, every president since John F. Kennedy has called for greater volunteerism. Some calls have been resonant, others barely audible; some have produced new federal agencies; others, private initiatives. But whatever the form, volunteering has been a staple of presidential agendas since 1961.

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### The Presidential Call to Service

Kennedy's call to service was the most eloquent and famous. Like Bush, Kennedy viewed volunteerism as essential to defending the nation in a time of great risk. "In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. . . . The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world. And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." Kennedy's Peace Corps was the first in a long list of federal programs to promote volunteerism.

Lyndon Johnson followed Kennedy's lead in 1964 when he signed the Economic Opportunity Act creating Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). He also helped create the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the Foster Grandparents Program, the Senior Companion Program, and the Small Business Administration's Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). But Johnson never issued a stirring national call to volunteerism; rather, he rooted his volunteerism in a handful of important, but small, federal initiatives. Ironically, of all Johnson's efforts to draw young Americans into civic life, the Vietnam War probably did the most—albeit through marches, rallies, flag-burnings, and demonstrations.



Richard Nixon may have boosted volunteerism more than any other president in modern history. Just four months into his administration, Nixon had created a Cabinet Committee on Voluntary Action and an Office of Voluntary Action within the Department of Housing and Urban Development and appointed a special consultant to the president on voluntary action. In November, he announced his “National Program on Voluntary Action” and then

called ACTION. In late 1973 he signed the Domestic Volunteer Service Act, giving ACTION greater authority to design and implement new programs aimed at a wider range of audiences.

Jimmy Carter—perhaps surprisingly, given his own recent work promoting Habitat for Humanity—did not make voluntary service a centerpiece of his presidency, although he did reorganize ACTION halfway through his term to give the Peace Corps greater autonomy.

the first “Hands Across America” anti-hunger rally, which stretched across the nation.

George H.W. Bush was more Nixonian in his approach to volunteerism. He launched his “Points of Light” volunteering initiative in 1989 to call all Americans, including corporations, schools, and places of worship, to claim society’s problems as their own and to help solve them. His call led directly to the creation of the private nonprofit Points of Light Foundation, which merged with Nixon’s National Center for Voluntary Action in 1991 and is alive and active today. Together with other nonprofits, the Points of Light Founda-



AFP/Corbis

established the National Center for Voluntary Action, a nonprofit, nonpartisan private group, to pursue its goals.

Nixon also created an entirely new federal bureaucracy to administer the government’s growing collection of voluntary programs. In 1971, he placed the Peace Corps, VISTA, the Foster Grandparents Program, SCORE, all the volunteer programs in the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Office of Voluntary Action within a new agency

Ronald Reagan established the White House Office of Private-Sector Initiatives in 1981 in the belief that such initiatives would “accomplish far, far more than government programs ever could.” He said little more about volunteerism until 1986, when his May 24 radio address focused on the rising tide of volunteerism—“a reassertion of good, old-fashioned neighborliness now that our country has regained its self-confidence.” The next day he joined in



Mark Wilson/Reuters/Getty Images

tion connects citizens to volunteer opportunities and dispenses advice and research on best practices to make those opportunities as meaningful as possible.

Bill Clinton also did his share to promote federally sponsored volunteer service, placing his National and Community Service Trust Act at the top of his first-year agenda. The resulting Corporation for National and Community Service administers the AmeriCorps volunteer service program, the Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America; it also absorbed all the programs of

**ACTION.** And in April 1997 Clinton joined former presidents Bush, Carter, and Ford—not to mention Oprah Winfrey—in the Presidents' Summit for America's Future in Philadelphia. The summit produced a new nonprofit organization called America's Promise to help children and youth.



The National Archives



Bettmann/Corbis

### Evaluations of Impact

George W. Bush's recent call for volunteerism fits comfortably within the tradition established by Nixon, Reagan, and his father. His focus is on the traditional notion that individuals should give to their communities out of the goodness of their hearts, not because of government inducements, though he acknowledges that inducements through programs such as AmeriCorps have their place in the volunteering regime.

Bush's call was unique in its specificity. He asked not just for community spirit, but for 4,000 hours of it. He set a measurable goal that every American can track by creating his or her own electronic journal on the Corporation for National and Community Service website. But Bush does not want just 4,000 hours of service. He wants Americans to get into the volunteering habit. Once past the first 4,000 hours, he hopes that volunteers will not stop.

Much as one can applaud the goal, however, little data suggests that presidents, past or present, have much weight when it comes to Americans' decisions to volunteer. According to the University of California, Los Angeles, Higher Education Research Institute, for exam-

ple, the number of freshmen who reported any type of volunteering has been going up 1–3 percent a year since 1989, with little variation that might be attributed to presidential activism.

None of this means that presidents should stop talking about volunteering or supporting federal programs such as AmeriCorps. The Corporation for National and Community Service reported a dramatic surge in website visits following the president's State of the Union address. Online applications to AmeriCorps increased 50 percent in the month following the address, while the number of visits to the Senior Corps website jumped more than 130 percent.

But the research does suggest that something other than presidential goal-setting may be at work in prompting someone to decide to volunteer. Most important, it turns out, is making sure that volunteers are engaged by people they know and that their service allows them to make a difference.

### The Service-Learning Effect

Ongoing research by the Higher Education Research Institute suggests that ser-

vice learning has a powerful effect on volunteering. According to a January 2000 research-in-progress report, college students who enrolled in a service-learning course were particularly aware of the benefits of community service—probably, the authors surmise, because they discussed their service with each other and received emotional support from faculty. The study is based on a random sample of more than 22,000 undergraduates, most of whom entered college in the fall of 1994. Compared with students who did traditional community service, students in service-learning courses were more likely to develop a heightened sense of civic responsibility and personal effectiveness through their work.

### All Volunteering Is Local

Parents, teachers, rabbis, and pastors may all have far greater sway over the decision to volunteer than presidents do. Presidents can certainly light the match, but others must fan the flame. The influence starts at home. A 2002 random-sample survey of 1,500 youths aged 15 to 25 conducted on behalf of the

University of Maryland's Center for Information and Research in Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) found that young Americans who discuss politics at home are much more likely to register to vote, trust government, believe politicians pay attention to their concerns, and say they can make a difference solving community problems. In fact, dinner-table conversations about politics are more strongly related to volunteering than are traditional demographic variables such as race, sex, education, and income. As CIRCLE concludes, "Parental socialization affects both whether young adults volunteer, and how often."

The personal influence continues in connecting a diffuse readiness to volunteer with real opportunities. According to a 1997 random-sample survey of 1,002 youths aged 15 to 29 conducted for DoSomething, a national nonprofit that encourages community organizing, young Americans hear about volunteer opportunities with a community organization from a host of sources—advertisements (66 percent), friends or family members (59 percent), teachers (54 percent), posters or flyers at school (48 percent), specific organizations (48 percent), places of worship (42 percent), jobs (38 percent), coaches, scout leaders or other local leaders (33 percent), and groups to which they belong (30 percent). Obviously, there is plenty of chatter out there on volunteering.

But not all sources produce results equally. Forty-two percent of young Americans who heard about a volunteering opportunity from a direct source (friend, family member, coach, scout leader, teacher, or the organization itself) volunteered—as against only 14 percent of those who heard from an indirect source (place of worship, job or employer, posters or flyers, and advertisements).

And the more contacts from direct sources, the greater the results. Just 14 percent of students who never heard from a direct source said they volunteered, compared with 25 percent who heard from one source, 41 percent who heard from two, 47 percent from three, and 62 percent from four. Just as in the CIRCLE study, volunteering is clearly

related to social networks. Having a parent who is, or was, involved in community activity, as well as being a young person who attends religious services regularly, also increases volunteer experience.

All volunteering, it seems, is local. Presidents can opine all they wish about the need for greater engagement, but parents, friends, and the volunteer organizations themselves get the results.

### **The Chance to Make a Difference**

To get Americans into the volunteering habit, though, it will not be enough to ask them to volunteer—or even to get them to show up for a first experience. The service itself must be meaningful or the volunteers will not come back.

According to the DoSomething survey, young Americans respond to programs that make good use of their time. Volunteers want to make a difference—make key decisions, see the effects of their work, gain valuable experience, skills, or contacts. Half of the DoSomething respondents who made key decisions rated their volunteer experience as excellent, compared with just 29 percent of those who did not; 46 percent who could see the impact of their work also rated their experience as excellent, as against just 15 percent who could not.

Although a lack of time is by far the most important reason cited by most young Americans for a decision to stop volunteering, frustration and a lack of meaning may also diminish future engagements. Without question, for example, the quality of their volunteer experiences affects the way students view future jobs in charitable organizations. According to a May 2002 random-sample survey of 1,015 college seniors, students who volunteered and rated their experience as very positive and found their skills and talents very well used were more likely than others to consider seriously a career in the nonprofit sector. For example, 23 percent of students who felt their skills and talents were very well used said they had seriously thought about a job in the nonprofit sector, compared with 10 percent of those whose skills and talents were not used well at all, and 0 percent

who never volunteered at all. To the extent that interest in work in the non-profit sector can be used as a surrogate for future interest in volunteering, these data suggest that the quality of the volunteer experience matters.

### **Strengthening the President's Call**

If President Bush wants Americans, especially young Americans, to meet his 4,000-hour goal, he might broaden his agenda to include three provisions related to this research.

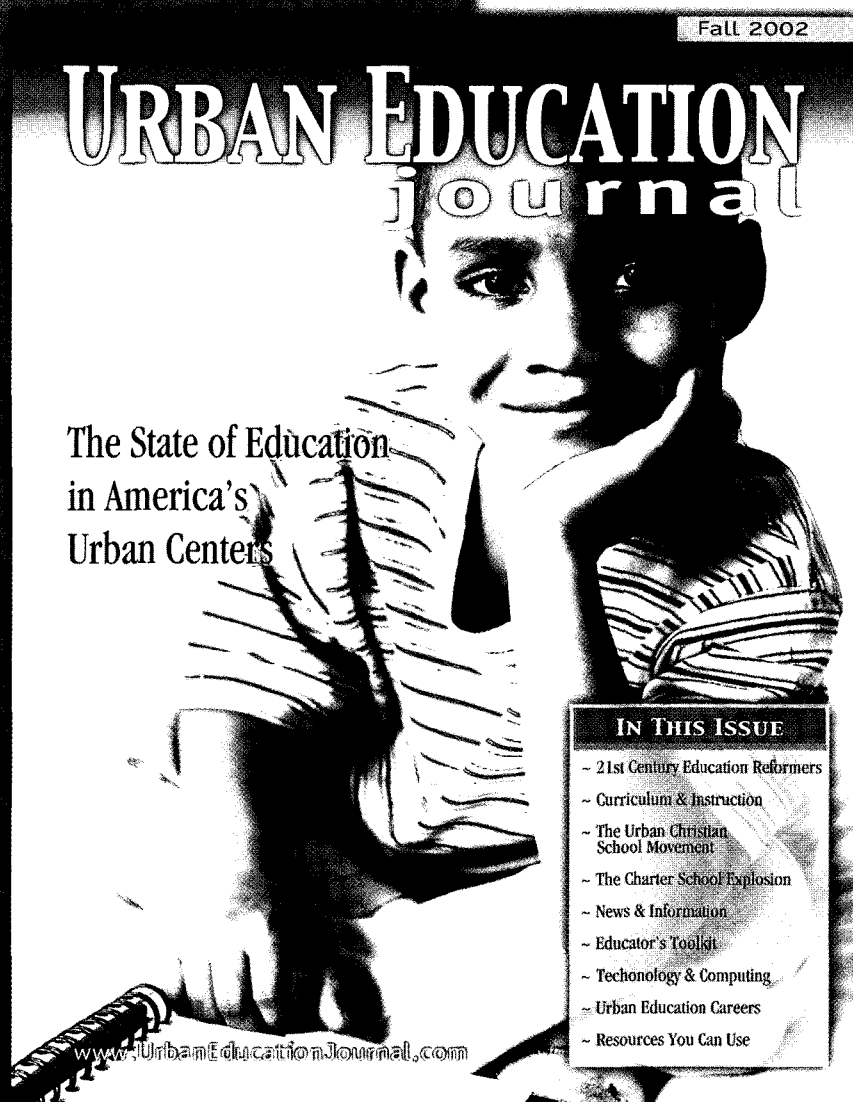
First, he should ask Congress for more funding to promote more service-learning opportunities at the primary, secondary, and college levels. The federal Learn and Serve America program should be highlighted for the largest increase in funding possible. Congress would be well-advised to change the AmeriCorps job description to include an explicit commitment to recruiting and connecting volunteers at the local level.

Second, the president might encourage his Corporation for Community and National Service to enlist parents, peers, and organizations to help advertise and promote volunteering. Although young Americans do pay attention to flyers and conventional advertising for volunteering, they respond best to direct appeals from the people and organizations they already know.

Third, and perhaps most important, the president should ask Congress to provide limited grants to make sure that volunteers are wisely used by the organizations they serve. According to Leslie Lenkowsky, the chief executive of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the success of any call to service "needs to go beyond massing forces to figuring out how to deploy them most effectively." One might add "and making sure they are wisely used." The federal budget includes no money to build capacity in the nonprofit sector or within faith-based organizations. President Bush may well encourage more volunteers to show up, but it is up to the organizations they serve to provide the work needed for a longer engagement. ■



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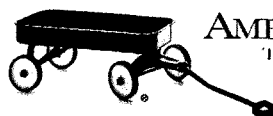
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